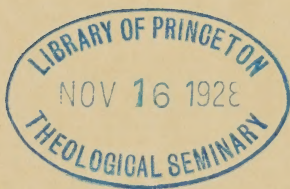


THE  
SHINING MYSTERY  
OF JESUS

DOUGLAS EDWARDS

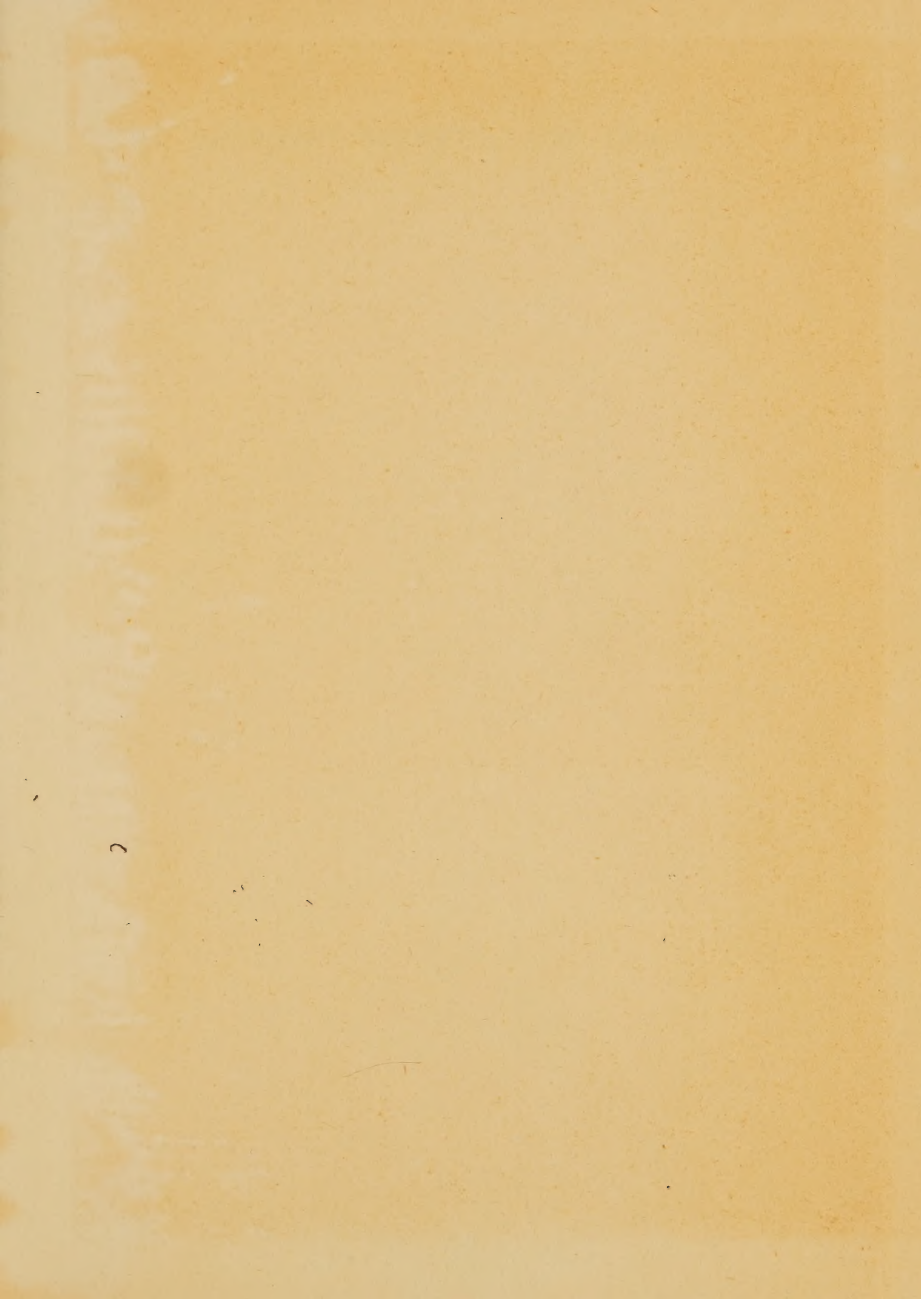




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The shining mystery of Jesus







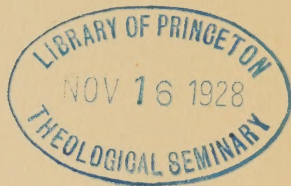


THE SHINING MYSTERY OF JESUS

. . . . "Think, Abib; dost thou think?  
.  
So, through the thunder comes a human voice."

BROWNING, *The Epistle*.

# THE SHINING MYSTERY OF JESUS



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EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD

WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY  
THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.  
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## PREFACE

DEFINITE religious convictions, it is said, seldom commend a book to a wide public. The opinion—once so fashionable—that the world is breathlessly eager for a “ message ” seems to have lost its vogue. It even appears possible that indecision has charms of its own. In such circumstances it is obvious that eagerness, if found at all, must be found in the bearers of the message. At the same time it is more than hinted that such eagerness may safely be trusted to defeat its own ends.

Yet reflection reassures the ardent. For it was through just this foolish eagerness—the foolishness of preaching—that the extraordinary thing called Christianity took root and grew. It is therefore possible to hope that this putting of that unchanging proclamation may penetrate into circles quite other than ecclesiastical, and even find its way into those individual fastnesses whose drawbridges seldom fall to admit the passage of the Christian enthusiast in person.

What makes such a hope reasonable is that the book rests its whole weight upon the Gospels ; for the Gospels are to-day almost an undiscovered country. Despite the countless books that have been written round them, and sometimes because of those books—for this particular circle is apt to wander into strange ellipses—the marvel of the Gospels themselves is often unremarked. It is the

sole aim of the present writer to direct attention to that standing wonder, and to ensure, if possible, the refusal of all substitutes.

To-day the number of such substitutes is legion : so that it would be invidious to mention any particular example. The perusal of one of them provoked these pages. There was then left, upon one mind at least, a dreary impression as of some lovely-winged creature tarnished and mangled by the enthusiastic but destructive hand of a collector intent only upon acquiring another specimen for his cabinet.

If a rival account is here attempted it is strictly in the nature of a guide-book. And indeed it is a guide-book that is needed. No alert mind can rest content with another man's Jesus, and still less with the Jesus of his own imaginings. This book is therefore a frank appeal to the Gospels, and in no sense whatever a substitute for them. It is written in the confidence that the truth which is there so vividly presented will attest itself afresh to straightforward inquirers, more or less adrift, like all of us, upon this strange sea of human life on which we are *nolens volens* all embarked.

It would, of course, be possible to approach the Gospels from the opposite direction to the one adopted here. It would be possible to begin with our human situation, with its needs and hopes and fears, and to show how these needs are met, these hopes substantiated, and these fears allayed by the Christ of the Gospels and the Church.

As it is, one book cannot do everything ; and for the moment it is proposed to start from the Christ of the Gospels and the Church, the author being confident that the Divine and Only Fair will meet needs and hopes and



fears of which he himself perhaps may never have been conscious.

It is, then, to the Gospels as they stand that, in the first instance, he here pins his faith. In his view the Gospels illuminate the Church, and the Church illuminates the Gospels. Many, however, who—for one reason or another—are prejudiced against the Church, are not prejudiced against the Gospels; though they often feel dimly that there must be in these three small pamphlets something more than has yet fully met their eye.

“These *three* small pamphlets” is said advisedly. Broadly speaking, the book deals only with the First Three Gospels. To give reasons for this restriction would be a waste of time. It is only asked that the book be tested by its fidelity to these three Gospels, and that a real effort be made to see those Gospels as they are, to read them as something fresh—their keen edge unblunted by familiarity, and their sublime unity unruffled by the blasts of critical controversies. So read, they may well attest themselves as the clue to the Life that alone is worthy of the name of Life.

D. A. EDWARDS.

ST. STEPHEN'S HOUSE,  
OXFORD, 13th June 1928.



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# INTRODUCTION

By the BISHOP OF MANCHESTER

ONE of the most significant facts of our time is the great demand, as evidenced by the supply, for books setting before their readers the Life and Character of Our Lord. There is a new turning of the mind of men towards Him. The very fact that many have discarded the use of time-honoured theological expressions concerning Him has enabled those who have so cleared their minds of pre-suppositions to see Him with a new vividness as a real historical figure. Moreover, the immense labours of New Testament scholarship have reconstructed the original setting and the impression made on contemporaries in such a way as to bring fresh life to the old story.

This is a great gain, and in the end the gain will prove to be permanent, and any incidental losses to be temporary ; for the nett result of seeing Jesus as He was will be to lead men back to that same belief concerning Him to which the impact of His Personality led His own disciples and the early Church, and then the old convictions will be held with a new energy, because they will be the apprehensions of a personal experience.

At present there are many who suppose that to reach " the Jesus of History " is to dispense with all theology. It is often easy to detect the vicious circle implicit in the

argument followed. First, it is assumed that the historic Jesus must have been not only Man, but a mere man ; then, in deference to this assumption, all passages in the first three Gospels which involve the contrary are cut out as interpolations made under the influence of later theological belief ; finally, it is triumphantly pointed out that the Gospels so edited contain no evidence of supernatural claims.

Whatever else such a process may be, it is not scientific criticism. And the Jesus whom it presents to us could never have become the origin of the great historic enterprise called Christianity. It is not because Jesus had a new notion of God that men have found in Him their joy and their hope ; it is because in Him they have seen God Himself. Moreover, this is not a late discovery of the theologians : it is the record of the earliest witnesses. Listen to this : “ All things have been delivered unto me of my Father ; and no one knoweth the Son save the Father ; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.” It sounds as if it came from the Fourth Gospel. But it does not ; it comes from that material which, the critics tell us, is probably the oldest and best of our sources—the material common to the First and Third Gospels which is not found in the Second (St. Matthew xi. 27 ; St. Luke x. 22). In St. Matthew’s Gospel it is followed at once by the words : “ Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest ” ; and, indeed, if the former and theological saying is not true, the second, the gracious invitation, could not be justified.

Now this book is admirably planned to bring its readers back from the superficial “ humanitarian ” accounts of



Our Lord to the stupendous fact to which the evidence, scientifically considered, really points. The author is well acquainted with the course and results of Biblical scholarship, and his treatment of his material is everywhere guided by the principles of scientific criticism. But he does not obtrude any "learning" upon the straightforward presentation of his theme. Anyone of reasonably alert intelligence can grasp his points and follow his argument, and will never be puzzled or baffled by technicalities. He helps us to look with the eyes and hear with the ears of the first disciples, so that we are led by our actual awareness of Christ's uniqueness from the realisation that "never man spake as this man" to the conviction that as we watch Him "we behold His glory, glory as of an only begotten Son from a Father."

The faith of Christians is not a superstructure based on historic facts which were complete without it ; it is the articulation of what is present in the only facts in question for which there is any historic evidence. Because Mr. Edwards sets this forth so clearly and so impressively I feel honoured at being allowed to add to his book these few words of my own, and to commend what he has written to the widest possible circle of readers.

W. MANCHESTER.

“ I asked  
Fairly and frankly, what might be  
That History, that Faith, to me  
—Me there—not me in some domain  
Built up and peopled by my brain,  
Weighing its merits as one weighs  
Mere theories for blame or praise.”

BROWNING, *Easter Day*, Canto xiv.

# PART ONE

## THE UNIQUE FIGURE

### CHAPTER I

#### HIS CHARACTER

*"Never man spake like this Man."*<sup>1</sup>

. . . Despite occasional archaisms the words of the Gospels remain astonishingly fresh. There is no knowing when—annihilating centuries—they may not change a man's world to-day just as they did for many when they were first uttered. What is the secret of this perennial youth? Babble as we may of originality such a term seems adequate only when given the fullest content that it is capable of holding. Its real force is best appreciated in the simple verdict passed by contemporaries of Jesus who heard Him for themselves.

There are some, indeed, who claim to find in the simple yet penetrating comment with whose quotation this chapter begins nothing more than an expression of naïve wonder that a religious teacher should speak so naturally of the things of God. The actual context of the phrase, however, makes it plain that there was far more than this in the minds of the original speakers. Emissaries of the chief priests had been sent to apprehend Jesus. They returned with their mission unaccomplished. And the only excuse that they had to offer for this dereliction

<sup>1</sup> John vii. 45 f.

## 4 THE SHINING MYSTERY OF JESUS

was that they were overawed by the way in which He spoke.

If modern readers fail to experience that sense of awe it is because they so seldom allow His words to speak for themselves. They are already of opinion that there will be found in them nothing unique or mysterious—above all, no note of commanding and assured authority. And so they never ask themselves the question which most needs asking. They never inquire whether it is possible to conceive of any Jew but One taking upon his lips such words as these.

Jesus, we are told, stood in the prophetic line. But who can imagine Isaiah inviting men to take his yoke upon them and to learn of him because he is meek and lowly of heart? There are many other words of Jesus whose unique character will, if the same simple experiment be made, assail the intelligence (which familiarity has all but benumbed) with an illuminating, vivifying shock.

No one in human history has ever spoken with such assurance as the Carpenter of Galilee. We can go further, for this assurance does not admit even of comparison. No other teacher, no other prophet, ever subordinates his teaching to himself. Jesus did so constantly and indeed normally. The very quietness of His assumption of authority diverts attention from its daring.

How startling then, when we once perceive the boundless character of the claim implied, to find Him speaking in such easy, matter-of-fact tones. He does not strive nor cry, nor lift up His voice in the streets, but says simply, "but I say unto you."<sup>1</sup> That imperious tranquillity,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 21 f, 27 f, 31 f, 33 f, 38 f, 43 f.

contrasted, for example, with the sonorous tones of Isaiah, recalls the ancient story of wind and fire and earthquake succeeded by a still small voice. When men hear it—and that requires a delicate, attentive ear—they are, like Elijah, struck with awe.

But at this point someone may protest that such an estimate is, after all, only the product of individual subjective fancy. In that case the appeal must lie to the reader. Every vital interpretation of great work must inevitably take the risk of such a challenge. In the long run the individual must make his own decision. Yet even in the light of what has been said already, it may appear not unlikely that the very simplicity of the Speaker's language deceives those who look for argument and find conversation. For it is to conversation rather than to argument that these words belong. The "Sermon on the Mount" is a misnomer. Even to-day many people who value the Sermon on the Mount are apt to be misled by the word "sermon." For them a sermon means an address whose aim is to encourage people to live better lives and to give them such teaching about God as will help them to do so. Such a description would clearly fit the Sermon on the Mount. The trouble is it does not cover it. There is still something that makes this so-called "Sermon" unlike any other sermon—and it is this: where every other preacher appeals to some authority outside himself, Jesus does nothing of the kind. He speaks in His own name. It was this feature of the Sermon on the Mount which impressed the author of the First Gospel and led him to insert as a postscript to his record of it the astonished comment of the people who had heard in the synagogue at Capernaum the words of



## 6 THE SHINING MYSTERY OF JESUS

power with which the public ministry began. "For He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes."<sup>1</sup>

Were the scribes, then, who sat in Moses' seat not authoritative teachers? Indeed, they were. So much so that it has been the fashion in certain circles to contrast the religion of the Jews with the new religion of Jesus as a religion of authority with a religion of the spirit. The real contrast which inspired the ambiguous aphorism is the contrast between an authority claimed, inherited, derived; and an authority taken for granted, personal, underived. In short, it is a contrast between a relative and an absolute authority.

But once more, even here, in the case of the Sermon on the Mount, we are not left at the mercy of a mere subjective impression, however powerful and subduing. Nor is this recognition of the unique authority of Jesus the result of a simple inference from the pregnant, purely self-supported "I say unto you." For is it not asserted in the "Sermon" itself that beatitude is the ineffable endowment of those who are "for My sake" ill-spoken of?<sup>2</sup> Prophetic authority does not speak thus. And, again, to what other teacher does it belong, not only to demand obedience to his teaching, but to predict the coming of a day when faithless disciples will claim his indulgence because they had once eaten and drunk in his presence and he had taught in their streets? What other teacher ever warned his disciples that the penalty of faithlessness to the teaching given would be to hear their final doom pronounced by his own lips, and that that dreadful final sentence would be

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 28 f.; see Mark i. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 11; Luke vi. 22 f.

to depart from him, the teacher? <sup>1</sup> This incomparable note of absolute personal authority is sustained to the very end of the Sermon on the Mount, where the alternative between ruin and salvation for every individual is declared, in a vivid parable, to depend entirely upon whether that individual has done or has not done "these words of Mine." <sup>2</sup>

Two of the most recent studies of the Gospel record, extremely divergent in their methods of approach and in the conclusions which they draw, are at least united in their recognition that the words of Jesus in themselves stamp Him with the mark not merely of originality but of strict uniqueness. Thus Mr. Middleton Murry, commenting on a famous passage from the Gospel of the Hebrews, observes that none other than Jesus can have had that thought or framed those words. Canon Streeter uses similar language. "Christ is individually Himself and no one else . . . There is hardly a saying . . . in the first three Gospels which is not in some subtle way 'characteristic'; of which, if we found it in some other book, we should not at once say, 'That might have come from the Gospels.'" Now the point to which these writers call attention is the *inherently* original character of Christ's words. It is not merely that there are bursts of originality in His teaching, but that every word of Jesus, uttered in the most diverse contexts and evoked by the most various circumstances, bears in each case the signature, as it were, self-authenticating and beyond mistake, of a single hand. This teacher is immeasurably more than a retailer of admirable maxims; indeed, even prophetic insight is left halting far behind.

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 26 f; Matt. vii. 22 f.    <sup>2</sup> Matt. vii. 24; Luke vi. 47.

## 8 THE SHINING MYSTERY OF JESUS

It is true that so far we seem still to be left within the region of subjective impressions. And within that region it is impossible to *demonstrate* that He who spoke such words *ipso facto* merits a title more exalted than that of "the greatest of the prophets." So much indeed we might have expected. It is to those who "have ears to hear"<sup>1</sup> that Jesus appealed in the first instance. In the last resort much depends upon the nature of the ground into which the good seed falls. And in this field no man may judge his neighbour. The words of Jesus themselves will one day judge us all.

Nevertheless it is possible to prepare the ground. It has often been pointed out that a problem which seems completely solved causes no more perplexity, with the result that men may settle down to live their lives in what is actually a fool's paradise. In much the same way the conception of Jesus as the greatest of the prophets satisfies many people, with the result that they become blinded to His full significance. That is to say, His words are no longer free, so far as such people are concerned, to make their own impression. Any words of His which do not fit into the prophetic category will be quietly ignored. A premature decision, based on only part of the available evidence, develops a blind spot in the mind. To minds so darkened Jesus becomes merely a law-giver or merely a noble idealist. Honest and faithful may be such a disciple's attempt to obey the law or to realise the ideal, but for him the unique *personal* prestige of Jesus vanishes. The teaching of Jesus being secure, set down in black and white in the pages of the Gospels, the actual Jesus can go His way, and we neither know nor need to know

<sup>1</sup> Mark iv. 9.

what is become of Him. Thus an opaque veil is only too frequently hung between human souls and the Christ of the Gospel.

To those who feel the spell of His great words and yet refuse to look beyond them it will, then, be a service of the first magnitude if it can be shown from those words themselves that a greater than Jonah is here, and not only so, but that to *this* Person even the spacious category of prophet is totally and utterly inadequate. Now I think that this can be done, even from the angle of literary appreciation, in at least two ways. There are other ways, but from this particular point of view these two seem to be central and convincing.

In the first place, then, Jesus does something that no other prophet has ever done, and, what is more, something that no other prophet can even be conceived as doing. He makes His own character the standard of the godly life.

The undoubted fact that Jesus set before His disciples, as a practical aim capable of actual attainment, an ideal than which no greater can be conceived, bidding them to become perfect as their Father in Heaven is perfect, gives us pause at the very threshold of our inquiry.<sup>1</sup> His own question, recorded by St. Luke in the same "Sermon," rises unbidden to our lips. "Can the blind lead the blind?"<sup>2</sup> If the disciple may expect to reach a height so sight-outrunning, what of the Master? For that Master Himself reminds us that the disciple is not greater than his teacher; although, when he has reached the final term of his development, he may hope to be as his teacher is.<sup>3</sup> Can it be, then, that this Man is already perfect as the Father in Heaven?

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vi. 39 f.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xi. 28 f.

Imagine, if you can, Isaiah proposing such a celestial aim to poor humanity, claiming, too, to be the Master of any disciples who may volunteer to follow, and as such to be the norm and pattern of an achievement so exalted. Already the sides of our "prophetic" mould begin to crack and shiver. When we turn to the words, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest,"<sup>1</sup> it may be said that the "prophetic" mould is shattered beyond all repair. The prophets proclaimed an authoritative message "in the voice of a herald, using the name of God and giving no reasons." This Man gives no reasons, but neither does He use the name of God. Indeed, He points men here not to God in the first instance but to Himself. It is an outstanding example of what is massively characteristic of the Gospel as a whole. Teacher and prophet though He be, the Jesus of the Synoptists subordinates His teaching to Himself. He is the Master and not the servant of His "message." And in so doing He differs *toto coelo* from any prophet the world has ever seen.

A few familiar examples of His utterances will serve to make this point even clearer. Men are to take His yoke upon them and learn of Him. He is meek and lowly of heart, and that is reason enough for men to make such meekness their own ideal. The Son of Man comes, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. That is a final argument against ambition.<sup>2</sup>

No prophet ever spoke like this. No prophet ever made his own character the standard of the godly life. No prophet invited men to put their trust in him as a guide to perfection. No prophet bade men to make him their

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 28 f.

<sup>2</sup> Mark x. 45 ; Luke xxii. 27.

example and to learn of him. No prophet proclaimed that he would give men rest. Nor do we expect such a prophet to appear. Jesus, in short, not only did something that no prophet had ever before done, but something which no prophet as such is conceivably capable of doing.

All this lies on the surface for those with eyes to see and ears to hear. Further, Jesus was Himself clearly quite conscious of the fact, and said so plainly. Prophets and kings had desired to hear the words which fell upon the favoured ears of His disciples.<sup>1</sup> The Baptist, for the precise reason that he is His own forerunner, is himself declared to be greater than a prophet.<sup>2</sup> And in His own person the prophets are fulfilled.<sup>3</sup>

Such, then, is the first of the two main indications afforded by the words of Jesus as they stand, that to describe Him as the greatest of the prophets is to do Him less than justice. A prophet speaks in the name of God, Jesus in His own.

The second indication is one which, like the first, gains in impressiveness with every re-reading of the Gospels. Both are things which, in the vivid language of Jesus Himself, sink down into our ears. Both require extremely careful statement if we are to draw out their full evident implications, without at the same time moving an inch beyond the evidence. And this is perhaps especially true of the point which it still remains to make. For the question now to be considered concerns the whole attitude of Jesus towards sin.

In this connection what will most forcibly strike any careful reader of the Synoptic Gospels is the fact that Jesus simply takes for granted the universality of sin. He

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vii. 26 f.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 17.



assumes as beyond the possibility of question that man as such is sinful. It is the presupposition of His whole message and mission. His public ministry begins with a call to repentance<sup>1</sup> and ends with a prayer for our forgiveness who know not what we do.<sup>2</sup>

And if sin is universal it is also deadly. Both these assumptions underlie His answer to those who asked Him whether a fatal accident was to be regarded as God's judgment on men more wicked than the ordinary run. "I tell you, nay; but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."<sup>3</sup> All are to strive to enter the way—the narrow way—that leadeth unto life; they are to strive precisely because there is another way—leading to destruction—which is both broad and crowded.<sup>4</sup>

Now, if this is so—if repentance is the narrow way—then repentance is more than a good-natured turning towards God. Nor is it to be accomplished in a moment. It is an affair of lifelong striving and there are many who will strive to enter in and shall not be able. The first step, and indeed the one continuously necessary, human contribution towards the attainment of eternal life, is the recognition of one's personal sinfulness.

Once more, then, Jesus assumes as beyond question that men as such are sinful. Even when He refers to their good deeds, His comment is, "If ye then, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."<sup>5</sup> And the pattern prayer on which all prayers of the Heavenly Father's children are to be fashioned contains a petition for forgiveness.

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiii. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xiii. 4 f.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. vii. 13 f.

<sup>5</sup> Luke xi. 13.

Only in the light of our knowledge of this unswerving conviction of man's inherent and culpable sinfulness does the attitude of Jesus towards both Pharisees and harlots become vividly clear. The Pharisees were not wrong in condemning prostitutes for being prostitutes. It was not even their chief fault that they were content with loveless condemnation and were without compassion. Their chief fault was that they never condemned themselves. The Pharisee went down to his house less justified than the publican simply because he was incapable of self-abasement.<sup>1</sup> And he needed to abase himself in the presence of God. All men need to do so. For all are sinners, and the first step towards eternal life is to recognise the fact.

We are thus enabled to appreciate the massive irony of the reply to certain Pharisees who looked askance at Jesus for the company He kept. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I am come not to call the righteous, but sinners."<sup>2</sup> There *are* no righteous. Again, "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance."<sup>3</sup> They *do* need it; but unhappily they don't desire it. And salvation is for those who desire salvation and are conscious that they need it. There remains one incident which, with the possible exception of that of the penitent thief, is the most beautiful and moving of all those recorded in the Gospels.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus had accepted from a Pharisee an invitation to a meal. On His arrival His host, with a rudeness which only extraordinary patience could have borne, omitted all the

<sup>1</sup> Luke xviii. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xv. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ii. 16 f.

<sup>4</sup> Luke vii. 36-50.

customary attentions due to a guest. But a woman of the city, branded as belonging to the harlot class, intruded herself into the house and stood weeping behind the feet of Jesus as He lay reclining on the couch. Presently she began to fondle those dust-stained feet, washing them with her fast-falling tears, drying them with her hair, and kissing them repeatedly. Finally, breaking the alabaster box which she had brought, she anointed His feet with fragrant nard. The Pharisee's already low opinion of his guest fell even lower. Men had spoken of this fellow as a prophet, and he could not even see that the creature to whose caresses He submitted was "*that* sort of woman"!

Then Jesus turns to him with an irrelevant question. A certain lender had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, the other fifty. And when they were penniless and had nothing to pay he freely forgave them both. Which of the two, therefore, will love him most? "I suppose," replies Simon—a little impatiently perhaps—"he to whom he forgave most." Jesus approves the answer, and then drives the parable home with the piercing vigour of which He was a master. Turning to the woman, still standing as she was behind His couch, He draws Simon's attention to her. But with what a purpose! It is to contrast her favourably with the Pharisee, His host. She has fulfilled with an extravagant devotion those duties of courtesy which Simon had pointedly omitted to perform. "*Wherefore* I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven; for she showed such great love: and to whom little has been forgiven the same loveth little."

To draw a moral is to paint the lily. Yet there is an excuse for those who presume to comment on the

Gospels, fantastic though such an undertaking often appears to be.

“ For, don’t you mark, we’re made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;  
And so they are better, painted—better to us,  
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that—  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out.”

The woman had been forgiven already. She had been forgiven before ever she intruded herself into that room. The whole narrative puts this point absolutely beyond question.

The second word, then, spoken to the woman herself, was a word of encouragement, gently uttered, to remind her that the evil past is blotted out, the slate washed clean. Undeterred by the pitiless contempt of men, she might go in peace, confident in the memory of His compassionate all-powerful act. She had been forgiven by Jesus Himself—a fact which He bade her call to mind for her great and endless comfort.

Clearly, the sinner who entered Simon’s house that day was a forgiven sinner, for whose passionate self-forgetful love Pharisaic scorn had lost its terrors.

But what of the Pharisee ? He had not been forgiven—as his lack of love showed plainly. Yet he needed forgiveness ; for he, too, had nothing to pay. Jesus is perfectly just to Simon. He neither denies nor condones the woman’s sins. They were many. And they were worse than Simon’s—ten times worse. But she has recognised the fact with all her heart, and she has been forgiven. Hence she has a future and is blessed. But Simon,

unless he too repent, has no future. He is bankrupt before God, tied and bound by the chain of those sins whose existence he refuses to admit. All men, it is implied, are bankrupt before God. All are tied and bound. And until they make it possible by an honest recognition of that fact for the pitifulness of Divine mercy to free them from that chain, they have no future—"Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

More than enough has now been said to show that the assertion with which the present discussion began—namely, that Jesus assumes as beyond the possibility of question that men as such are sinful creatures—is more than a blank assertion. It is a dogmatic statement in the sense in which every categorical statement is dogmatic. But it is not an arbitrary and ill-founded statement—which is what many people unhappily mean by the word dogma. It is founded upon the cumulative and consentient evidence of every word of Jesus that bears upon the point at all.

This, then, is the first step towards appreciating the second chief indication in the Gospel story that Jesus differs *toto coelo* from any prophet the world has ever seen. But it is only a preparatory step, though an essential one. It had been said by others than Jesus that "none is righteous, no not one."<sup>1</sup> Two further steps remain yet to be taken if we would see clearly the strictly unique character of the Subject of the Gospel portrait. Before doing so let us take an illustration from pictorial art.

Of every great picture it is true to say that, to see it as it is, we must "see it steadily and see it whole." When it is a question of appreciating technique, the student will concentrate on certain aspects of the picture, its grouping

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xiv. 3; Cf. Rom. iii. 10.

or what not, abstracting from the whole. Such work is of very great value, but only because it is subordinate to a further purpose. The object of all this detailed study is that he may see more in the picture than he saw before. But it is to the picture as a whole that he must return, if it is to be a picture and not just a pattern. The picture is its own inimitable self. It is not given as a result of adding together a certain number of detailed observations. It is a living whole, of which the observed details are the mutually constituent parts. The same thing holds good of the Gospel portrait. And so we must now bear in mind that aspect of the whole picture at which we have arrived.

Remembering, then, His unqualified conviction as to the universality of sin, we go on to observe that Jesus denies any man's right to judge another, unless he himself is faultless. "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the plank that is in thine own eye: then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the speck that is in thy brother's eye."<sup>1</sup> On Jesus' own premises that amounts to an absolute prohibition. If all are "evil," if none is without sin, then who may judge his brother? And, remember, what are "motes" in our view are "beams" in His. To be contemptuously angry with another is to incur the guilt of murder;<sup>2</sup> to foster carnal desire is to be guilty of adultery;<sup>3</sup> it is not sufficient to refrain from hating your enemy, you must sincerely love him.<sup>4</sup>

Surely with that relentless "*cast out first*" ringing in his ears, none but a very frivolous disciple would dare pass judgment on another. Jesus Himself declares that men are incapacitated for final judgments of whatever kind.

<sup>1</sup> Luke vi. 37 f. and Luke vi. 41 f.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Luke vi. 27.



Sin has dimmed their moral sight. They cannot even be certain that their ideals are right. The very light that is in them may be darkness.<sup>1</sup>

Are we, too, blind, that we do not see to what a soul-shaking conclusion such words of Jesus move the mind, recoiling incredulously, as well it may, before a conviction from which there is yet in reason no escape? Every sentence of His quoted here is itself a moral judgment of the most far-reaching and authoritative kind. On any hypothesis but one, must we not all with one voice exclaim, "Physician, heal thyself"?<sup>2</sup> On any hypothesis but one, must we not brand this Man as at the very least an unconscious hypocrite? If man's moral insight is impaired by sin, if every least divergence from God's perfect will is sinful, if it is forbidden to the sinner to pass judgment, then the habitual language of Jesus can have but one explanation. What need have we of any further witness? It is superfluous to multiply quotations and draw attention to His particular judgments—upon the Pharisees,<sup>3</sup> upon Judas,<sup>4</sup> upon the unbelieving cities,<sup>5</sup> upon the Jewish people as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Already, out of His own mouth, we convict Him of a moral purity unstained.

And if this conviction on moral grounds alone is ineluctable, on religious grounds it is even less capable of evasion. This book is written for religious people, Christian or otherwise, who, in the vast conflux of critical hypotheses, are apt to miss the full force of the Gospel witness as a whole and to ask themselves whether the Early Church, in the first flush of her enthusiasm, went perhaps "too quick, too fast, too far." Such people will

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Luke iv. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xxiii. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Mark xiv. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Luke x. 13 f.

<sup>6</sup> Mark x. 3 ff.

be willing to admit that the Prodigal Son is the most moving of all the figures in the parables of Jesus. In him we see ourselves as we should like to be. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" <sup>1</sup>—immortal words that stir an echo in every at all awakened heart. In a sinful world penitence is of all things the most beautiful. But it has no place in the life of Jesus! Now *that* is staggering.

Surely the truth must burn itself into our hearts and minds. To this Person even the spacious category of prophet is totally and utterly inadequate. It is not only that He did what no other prophet ever did or can be conceived as doing. It is not only that He made His own character the standard of the godly life. It is that He was *justified* in acting thus because He was what no other prophet ever was or can be conceived as being, perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect, of a holiness undimmed.

Such, then, appears to be the inevitable outcome of the attempt which has so far been made to sum up the conclusion to which the words of Jesus force our minds, and the conviction which they impose upon our hearts. It remains only to conclude this chapter with one final remark. *The Gospels authenticate themselves*. Let me explain my meaning. It will be remembered that we have all along been abstracting from the Gospel picture, isolating certain aspects, in the hope that as the result of such a study we may be able to return to that picture with a gaze more steady and receptive than before. Two characteristics have thus been selected for attention. Yet these two characteristics alone, taken in combination, are not only astonishing. Apart from the picture of Jesus in

<sup>1</sup> Luke xv. 21.

the Gospels itself they are literally inconceivable. A man who makes his own character the standard of all character, and who while condemning sin in others is himself conscious of no sin, ought by all human inference to be a repulsive figure. Yet few would venture to apply that epithet to the Figure in the Gospels. The Evangelists have achieved the impossible, or rather they have depicted the unparalleled. This picture is beyond the competence of the supremest literary genius to compass by imaginative power. It was drawn by fairly ordinary men. But it was drawn from life. It is the picture of a Man, but of a Man unique in kind. The Subject is greater than His portrait. For here, strictly speaking, the Subject was Himself the artist. He not only sat for the picture, He inspired the painter to depict.

## THE UNIQUE FIGURE

### CHAPTER II

#### HIS CARRIAGE

THE Jesus of the Gospel portrait is emphatically Man. Their attention once riveted upon the picture, beholders become conscious of a real Person standing as it were behind the canvas, a Person characteristically human, yet of a mysterious appeal. The picture comes to life, and there appears a Man of flesh and blood, of like passions with themselves—a Man, moreover, with whom they feel instinctively a certain kinship.

It is a signal tribute to the force of His appeal that the fact of it excites so little wonder. Few, indeed, betray the least suspicion that in this Figure's very charm for human hearts lies hidden an element of mystery, to which breezy commonplaces about fellowship fail entirely to do justice. Only upon reflection is it even noticed, as a matter for surprise, that with all His calm assumption of paramount authority and all His utter moral self-assurance Jesus is an attractive person.

Somehow He has not at all the air of being on a pedestal. Yet why this should be the case is very far from obvious, for certainly He *ought* to have that air. He speaks habitually in the categorical imperative, differing utterly in this respect as much from Plato and Socrates on the one hand, as, on the other, from Isaiah or Ezekiel. Socrates did not proclaim truth authoritatively from

without ; he sought to elicit it by rational argument from within. Isaiah and Ezekiel used the name of God, crying : " Thus saith the Lord." Dr. Bevan's comment is very much in point : " The prophet and the philosopher speak in quite different tones of voice." That is evidently true. But Jesus speaks in a third tone as different from either of these as each is from the other, and men do not even notice it !

Not only so, but when their eyes and ears have once been opened to the stupendous fact of this unique and startling difference, it unaccountably continues to be recognised that against this Person any charge of arrogance is grotesquely out of place. " Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." <sup>1</sup> In such a sentence we catch the authentic inflexion of His voice. That is the assumption underlying all His utterance. Yet even when this tremendous assumption is given explicit expression no one has any native impulse to protest that the Speaker takes too much upon Himself. On the contrary, the conviction persists that in reality the fundamental fact about this Man is somehow His humility.

Now, the more the claims which Jesus made are pondered, the stranger will this ineradicable intuition of His essential humble-mindedness appear. Yet pondered they must be, by any mind at all alert. For this Man not only acted upon staggering assumptions : He made unparalleled demands. Quite uncompromisingly He claimed for Himself a personal devotion in comparison with which all other loyalties must yield. He who loves father or mother more than the Carpenter of Nazareth is not worthy

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 31.

of Him.<sup>1</sup> Those who for His sake, and for His sake alone, are content to lose their lives, will in that very act bring them to the birth.<sup>2</sup> The bare privilege of being His disciple is more than sufficient recompense for the surrender of all that a man has.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus, in short, has something to confer which can be conferred by no one else. Refreshment, forgiveness, healing, life itself, are in His power to give. Nor is there any man who for His sake leaves brothers, sisters, parents, children, houses, wife, or lands, but shall receive a hundred-fold in this present world and in the world to come eternal life.<sup>4</sup>

No one but Jesus has ever made such claims. No one but Jesus has ever made such offers. Stranger and more impressive still is the suggestion, everywhere present in His words and deeds, that He Himself is greater than His gifts, or rather that no claim or gift of His is external to Himself. He never points men away from Himself to God. He whom all unite in acclaiming as the greatest of spiritual teachers has no idea whatever of distinguishing between His teaching and Himself. He makes that distinction with unmistakable lucidity in the case of the Pharisaic teaching—what the Pharisees command, men must observe and do: what the Pharisees actually do, they must observe and utterly reject.<sup>5</sup> The Pharisees are authoritative teachers. Precisely what they are not is authoritative models. Jesus, on the other hand, consistently presents Himself as teacher and model both.

In this respect also, considered in itself, Jesus once more appears as strictly unique. It is true that the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Mark viii. 35; Luke xvii. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xiv. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Mark x. 29 f.      <sup>5</sup> Matt. xxiii. 2 f.



assertion has been challenged, but its justice can be demonstrated with comparative ease. It is only necessary to contrast Him for a moment with the one figure in history who might in this one matter be perhaps regarded as a rival claimant. That figure is the figure of the Buddha.

Gautama, however, did not propose *himself*, but his teaching, as the model which all seekers of true bliss should follow. No doubt the Buddha's ineffable experience of Nirvana guaranteed his exalted claims. He had found the peace he sought. His soul, freed from the trammels of desire, already dwelt in a repose which no earthly circumstance could shatter. And he knew the road by which this peace could be attained. Although no easy road, it was one which all who would were free to follow once Gautama had traced out the steps by which the goal might be reached.

Of that goal itself, as contrasted with the very different goal proposed by Jesus in the Gospels, there is much that might be said. This particular issue, however, is irrelevant to the question immediately in point. For what we are at present concerned to discover is whether it can be asserted of the Buddha, in the same sense as it can and indeed must be asserted of the Christ, that he consistently presents himself as teacher and model both. Did this teacher regard himself as integral to his own teaching, did this teacher subordinate his teaching to himself? That is the question we are now engaged in asking. Once firmly posed it admits of but one answer.

Gautama was the servant, not the master of his teaching. It was his system and not himself that mattered. When the Buddha was gone, the way would remain. Indeed,

if we follow his own teaching on the matter, the way *was* the Buddha. The last words of the great sage speak for themselves. "When I have passed away and am no longer with you, do not think that the Buddha has left you and is not still in your midst. You have my words, my explanations as to the deep things of truth, the laws I have had laid down for the society : let them be your guide ; the Buddha has not left you."<sup>1</sup> After this it may be permitted to repeat that Jesus, in presenting Himself as teacher and model both, occupies not merely a supreme but a unique position in the history of man.

This contrast between the Buddha and the Christ, between Gautama and Jesus, brings out into fuller relief the astonishing character of the claim that Jesus made to be personally integral to His teaching. As always in the first three Gospels, the claim is implied rather than stated, and for that reason it may by the indiscriminating eye easily be overlooked. Yet the claim is unmistakably there for all to see, and when once pointed out it can be ignored only by shutting the eyes altogether.

Many people, indeed, put on blinkers at the first glimpse. This admitted master of words must have meant less, not more, than He said. When He declared that none who loved parents or children more than Him was worthy of Him, He meant something rather different. He intended merely to declare that those who allowed family ties to hinder obedience to His teaching were not worthy of so high an ethic. When He proclaimed that He would give men rest, He really meant that He would put them in the way of finding it for themselves. And if such

<sup>1</sup> *Ency. Brit.* IV. 741 (11th Ed.). Article, "Buddha," by Dr. Rhys Davids.

expositors should at any time be pushed into a corner by some saying less amenable to dilution than usual, they can escape with ease and dignity by referring in general terms to the notoriously figurative character of oriental speech. As if the use of violent metaphors would hide rather than reveal one's meaning ! As if illustrations did not illustrate ! After all, which is clearer, to say, " Ye blind ones, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel " ;<sup>1</sup> or to say, " Ye of small moral discernment who confuse the relative importance of moral obligations " ? Jesus had no difficulty in saying what He meant to say, and in guarding against anything that would lend itself to radical misconstruction. The sustained emphasis upon His own personal importance is no accident ; it is deliberate and challenging. We may go further. It is the heart and core of His whole life and teaching.

It is, then, something more than an agreeable peculiarity ; it is, indeed, a fact of central and supreme significance, that among religious teachers Jesus is sharply distinguished by the immense value He attached to His own bodily presence among men. It is because of His bodily presence with them that His disciples cannot fast. One day that bodily presence will be taken from them and they will no longer be joyful, like companions of a youthful bridegroom.<sup>2</sup> Upon the woman who anointed Him at Bethany He pronounced a eulogy as extravagant as her own tribute, adding in explanation that she had anointed His body for the burying.<sup>3</sup> In both these words of Jesus there is the thought of something that is precious just because it is only for a time. Does not the same note ring in the lament over Jerusalem ? " Jerusalem,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 24.      <sup>2</sup> Mark ii. 19 f.      <sup>3</sup> Mark xiv. 6-9.

Jerusalem, how often did I wish to gather thy children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings.”<sup>1</sup> Here is something other than the farewell of a teacher. Teachers do not weep over recalcitrant pupils. In complete harmony with this whole arresting aspect of Jesus’ attitude, is His anger when the children were kept from Him.<sup>2</sup> It was good for them just to be with Him and taken up into His arms.

And so one incident leads on to another and we are reminded of an occasion more momentous when twelve men were set solemnly apart with the express purpose that they might be with Him and that He might send them forth, not to teach in the first instance, but to make authoritative proclamation.<sup>3</sup> Again and above all do we remember, that, in reply to the most poignant appeal that ever came to Him through human lips, Jesus, Himself approaching the last agony, offered His personal presence as the supreme consolation of human misery and the ineffable prize of human faith: “To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”<sup>4</sup>

In the light of this unique emphasis of Jesus upon His personal presence among men it may well happen that the Gospel as a whole will take on a novel character and reveal a facet to which the reader had hitherto been blind. For such episodes, slight sometimes in themselves, are revealing episodes. Indeed—faithfully considered—they offer the entranced eye something infinitely more than a new facet. They give the very balance of the picture. When that happens, all the rich detail—teachings, healings, symbolic actions, scattered sayings—

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 37-39; Luke xix. 41 f.      <sup>2</sup> Luke xviii. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Mark iii. 14 f.      <sup>4</sup> Luke xxiii. 43.

slips easily and swiftly into place. With a gasp of mingled astonishment and relief, the contemplating mind, in one all-embracing instant, reels and stands secure. The truth has made it free. And the truth is that this slender record surpasses all biography, this portrait exceeds all portraiture. Jesus—Jesus Himself—dominates this crowded canvas. Jesus—Jesus Himself—dominates His company, so that there is no member of it but derives all his significance from the relation which he holds to Him. At every moment, at every juncture, the same thing holds good, test it where you will. He is Himself the personal centre of it all. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Him, and it is He who binds up the broken-hearted and sets the captives free.<sup>1</sup> It is He in whom the prophets and the law find their ultimate completion, He who will give men rest.

Here, in the person of this strange, appealing, yet commanding figure, is something greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon, greater than the Temple.<sup>2</sup> There is never a moment when He is not plainly conscious of His own supreme personal importance in the lives of men. When He rode into Jerusalem and was greeted by the acclamations of the crowd, the Pharisees were shocked at His composed acceptance of these public plaudits. Perhaps He has not understood their drift, perhaps He has not heard what they are shouting! They approach Him, demanding that He silence His disciples. But Jesus is not shocked at all. What shocks Him is that the plaudits are so few. "I tell you if these were to keep silent the very cobbles would cry out!"<sup>3</sup> In the courts of the

<sup>1</sup> Luke iv. 18-21.      <sup>2</sup> Luke xi. 31 f. and Matt. xii. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xix. 37-40.

Temple itself a number of youths greeted Him with cries of "Hosanna to the Son of David." Chief priests and scribes thronged round indignantly, inquiring whether He had heard what they were saying. But He had heard ; and what He heard was welcome. Had they never read the prophetic words of the Psalmist : " Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise " ? <sup>1</sup>

After this we may well believe that the Fourth Gospel expresses not inaccurately the question that was constantly in the chief priests' minds. It is the question that we too are driven to ask, and to which we too must seek an answer : " Whom makest thou thyself ? " <sup>2</sup>

Who is this, who claims to be not only the channel, but—if words mean anything—the actual and necessary source, of gifts to body and soul alike ? Who is this, who is Himself the centre, as well as the authority, of all His teaching ? These are questions which must of necessity engage the minds of all who are sufficiently candid to recognise that the Gospel picture is no vain imagination, but a transcript from the life. On one solitary occasion the Jesus of the Synoptic record is represented as exhorting His disciples to have faith in God.<sup>3</sup> Normally, continually, emphatically, in almost every deed and word, He exhorts them to have faith in Him. Jesus, that is, proposes Himself as an object of religious faith.

Now it is astonishing how the self-evidence of this fact, so conspicuous throughout the Gospels, should have been simply overlooked. Volume has been heaped on volume to argue that Jesus knew Himself, or did not know Himself, to be the Messiah of Israel, the promised Christ of God. Upon the answer which they return to this question has

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxi. 15 f.

<sup>2</sup> John viii. 53.

<sup>3</sup> Mark xi. 22.



been held to depend the decision, positive or negative, which every man who has once fairly encountered Him in history must make about this Person—whether He be merely man or something more. Certainly the question as to the Messiahship of Jesus has, in its own place, an importance that may fairly be termed vital to any final estimate of His true character. But its place is not yet here. Supposing, for example, that it could be proved beyond dispute that Jesus never breathed the word *Messiah*, it would still remain beyond all reasonable challenge that He claimed a religious authority—and therefore a religious character and function—which differs utterly in kind from that claimed, or conceivably capable of being claimed, by anybody else.

Some such claim, indeed, is already implied in the whole method of His behaviour as a healer of disease. Happily, at this time of day it is permitted to weigh the evidence of these narratives of healing as they stand, without prejudice to the wider question of miraculous action as such. Men who have persuaded themselves that the great majority of Jesus' cures were non-miraculous no longer see any reason to doubt either the good faith or the competence of the evangelists in their main record of His healing work. The stories may therefore be examined on their merits, and the moment that is done one thing becomes certain. Whatever the nature of these cures, the method of their performance differs utterly from the method of the Nancy School to-day. That is to say, the cures of Jesus are incapable of being explained as due to the skilled use of suggestion.

The very fact that two methods so violently dissimilar as those of Nancy and of Galilee should ever have been

considered parallel is itself a biting commentary upon the frivolity with which the Gospels are not infrequently handled even by writers of no mean repute. In any other field of literary criticism judgments so superficial would suffice to ruin the critic's reputation. But in the case of these documents, which for nearly two thousand years have been living literature, moulding the deepest thoughts of men and enshrining their most soaring and most substantial hopes, analogies entirely beside the point are allowed equal credence and prestige with the soberest conclusions laboriously founded upon the texts themselves. If men wish to appreciate Shakespeare they sit at the feet of a Coleridge, a Bradley, or a Raleigh—men to whom Shakespeare is the breath of their nostrils, who would consider it all but sacrilege to impose upon their venerated author any theories other than those which are borne out by the illuminating text. When they wish to appreciate the Gospels they put their faith in amateurs whose reputation depends not upon the fidelity, but upon the originality, of their comments. Provided their theories are trenchantly stated and eloquently phrased, and commend themselves to the predispositions of the casual public, it is regarded as the mark of a small mind to raise the question whether their conclusions are fairly derivable from the total witness of the texts themselves.

It may therefore be the case that even to-day, when the admirable work of the Nancy School has ceased to occupy the foreground of the popular attention, the present writer will incur the charge of obscurantism by the mere fact that he denies that the cures of Jesus can be sufficiently explained as the triumphs of skilled suggestion on the Coué pattern. Yet the truth of this contention is evident,

though it is with no design of demolishing a dummy erected for the purpose that the attempt will now be made to make it plainer still. The mere act of comparison is illuminating in itself.

As Walter Bagehot has refreshingly observed, there is very little difference between one man and another, but what there is is very important. And comparison establishes differences. It may sometimes reveal the fact, till then unsuspected, that the things compared are really incommensurable. Some similarity, of course, there must be to make comparison possible at all. You cannot, for instance, compare a broom with neurasthenia. They have so little in common. It is possible to compare the healing methods of Nancy and of Galilee because both employ suggestion. For in every attempt to effect an alteration in a human being suggestion is of necessity a factor. There, however, the resemblance ends, and the startling differences begin. For the attitude and practice of Jesus differ radically from the attitude and practice of Coué. A series of antitheses may serve to make clear in what precisely the essential difference consists.

First, then, the Nancy School makes a definite claim—definite not only in the sense of being clear but also in the sense of being limited. Coué claims only to perform cures which are, in his own words, “in the domain of the possible.” Jesus, on the other hand, imposes no such limits upon the scope of His activities. Indeed He nowhere makes a definite claim to be in the first instance a “medical practitioner” at all. Rather He adopts the attitude of one who is inherently capable of meeting any situation, capable of bringing effective aid to anyone who requires, in any way, to be “made whole.” He explicitly

declares that, given faith, "all things are possible."<sup>1</sup> There is for Him no "domain of the possible" within which His operations are beforehand and of necessity confined.

To this difference of attitude there naturally corresponds a difference of method. Coué, as we have seen, makes a modest claim. Broadly speaking, what he undertakes to do is to "minister to a mind diseased." His whole system turns upon the illness or infirmity of the patient being only relative to his state of mind. To be curable at all, the sufferer, strictly speaking, must only *think* that he is ill. At any rate, his trouble must be primarily nervous, not primarily physical. This being so, what is needed is to establish or restore the confidence of the patient.

Thus we are led on to a second point of difference between the healing work of Coué and the healing work of Jesus. Confidence (as distinct from faith) depends upon demonstration. Therefore Coué must advertise his cures. Jesus endeavours constantly to conceal His, bidding patients tell no one of their healing.<sup>2</sup>

There is a third difference. The Nancy healer, whose aim is to convince the patient of what, in fact, is true—namely, that he is actually sound, or at the least that health is well within his grasp, naturally seeks to pluck out of his consciousness the whole persuasion that he is diseased at all. Jesus, on the other hand, encourages sufferers to be clear in their minds as to the infirmity from which they desire deliverance: "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?"<sup>3</sup> To sum up then, Jesus differs from Coué by setting no limits whatever to the field of His

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 23.  
Luke viii. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Mark viii. 25 ff. ; i. 42 ff. ; Matt. ix. 30 ;

<sup>3</sup> Mark x. 51.

effective operations, by endeavouring to conceal His actual cures, and by exclusively restricting His attentions to persons seeking a real cure of a real malady.

Now the reason of this striking and extensive difference is not so very difficult to seize. The explanation, so far as it goes, is luminously clear. Jesus has always some further purpose than the immediate cure. He is endeavouring to convince His world not that many of its ills are imaginary, but that whatever ills they have He can remedy. Where Coué seeks to inspire confidence Jesus seeks to evoke faith. Coué's patients must believe, not that their ills are curable, but that they are illusory. Jesus' patients must believe, not that their ills as such are curable, but that they are curable by Him.

Already the essential difference between the cures of Nancy and the cures of Galilee is becoming not only vivid but illuminating. Coué seeks to insert by stealth into a reluctant mind one definite persuasion. It is his business to insinuate a truth. His whole method is not to declare but to suggest. The more passive the patient the more possible will be the cure. Anything, therefore, that may stir into activity the conscious mind must be avoided. The healer must not show his hand. Above all, he must remember that anything in the nature of authoritative language will here be fatal to success.

Nothing could be more opposite to the attitude and method of Jesus. "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" "Thy faith hath made thee whole."<sup>1</sup> At Nancy language of this kind would properly cause scandal. To require a voluntary effort from the patient! Deliberately to obtrude between him and healthy-mindedness

<sup>1</sup> Mark x. 52 ; v. 34 ; Luke xvii. 19 ; vii. 50.



the alien factor of the healer's personality ! What could be more detrimental to success ?

Our comparison then has not been without value. That it should have been dull is only natural. It is always tiring to elucidate the obvious. Yet from this tedium we reap a wonder. Jesus was no "learned leech." He sought a very different success. He came seeking faith. Men were to see in Him One in whom God was marvellously and uniquely active, to salute Him as their effective Saviour, to believe that with Him there is no gift impossible, to obey Him before His words commended themselves entirely to their judgment.

All this required an effort from men, and assumed a fact about them. He assumed that all men needed healing, and that He Himself, and He alone, could heal them. But He could heal them on one condition only. They must recognise their need, and they must believe that He could meet that need in its entirety.<sup>1</sup> Jesus refused, that is, to separate sickness of the body from sickness of the soul.

It is this simple fact which resolves the apparent paradox of the attitude which Jesus normally adopted towards His acts of bodily healing. He wished to conceal His cures lest He should be taken merely for a healer of the body. Yet, in the case of such a man as John the Baptist, He could appeal to His bodily cures as evidence of His power to heal the soul. "Go and tell John what things ye hear and see ; the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and to the poor in spirit is good news proclaimed : and blessed is he who finds in Me nothing that makes him stumble." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke viii. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vii. 22 f.



Now to say that the bodily cures of Jesus are incidental rather than primary is the extreme opposite of denying that those cures have an importance and a value of their own. Those who believed Him to be a healer of the body and nothing more were not sent empty away. Nevertheless, it was apparently with something like exasperation that Jesus healed such supplicants. He healed the leper, and then thrust him forth with anger, charging him sternly to tell no man of his cure.<sup>1</sup> He knew that such a man would misrepresent Him to the world ; He knew that his root malady—the sickness of the soul—remained untouched ; yet for all that He would not deny him the one gift which his limited faith made him competent to receive. In its own field, health of body was so manifest a good that the cures which He performed attested their own origin. Being self-evidently good, they were the work of God. To deny this was to sin against known truth. To ascribe to evil powers His healings of demoniacs was to calumniate the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>2</sup>

None the less, to regard Him only as a healer of the body was to miss completely His true function. Heal men He could and did, but that good work was incidental to a better ; it was not His specific function, not His chief *raison d'être*. In the field of faith—as in every field in which the spirit of man is capable of activity—the good could be the enemy of the best ; and it was then the most dangerous enemy of all—an enemy disguised. All through His public life Jesus sought to check the short-circuiting of faith.

It is worth while to emphasise this point. Jesus sought

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 43. (See Rawlinson's *Commentary on St. Mark, in loco*.)

<sup>2</sup> Mark iii. 26-30.

to check the short-circuiting of faith. Yet even that risk He was willing to incur rather than leave without healing any whose faith made his cure by Jesus a possibility. This one fact alone should prevent any too zealous statement of the major truth. For it is possible to put that truth in an unappetising and misleading way. It is possible to state it very barrenly. It is even possible to convey the impression that Jesus was without genuine compassion.

Now this immoral and shattering result is its own warning. That such an impression should be conveyed at all—however undesignedly—argues some fatal flaw in the presentation as a whole. What is that flaw? The original statement—that the cures of Jesus point beyond themselves—is self-evidently true, and can escape the notice of no one who regards the Gospel picture with a sincere, level gaze. The mischief begins with the assertion that those cures were *merely* illustrative in their purpose. From that point monstrous suggestions cluster thick and fast, culminating in a conclusion which is not only morally but logically contradictory with the premises afforded by the Gospel portrait as it stands. In short, the impression is conveyed that works of mercy were, so to speak, part of His propaganda, that His patients were so many pawns in a deeper game, and that men were healed not for their own benefit but for purposes of self-advertisement.

Touchstone said that there was much virtue in an “if.” There is certainly much mischief in a “merely.” For this whole grotesque distortion has sprung from the assertion that, because the cures of Jesus certainly point beyond themselves, they are merely illustrative. Of course they are illustrative, but they are more than illustrative—they are integral. They point beyond them-

selves, but they do so precisely because they are already visible exercises of a power, which can none the less be exercised, and which He desires to exercise, in a field beyond the range of sensible sight. That power is His own power—for He does not invoke the name of God. Yet it is a power divine. And for such it was taken by friends and enemies alike . . . provided that those friends or enemies were religious men themselves.

And, remember, it was to religious men as such that Jesus came. The Jew, as such, was a religious man, and it was to the Jew as such—to the lost sheep of the House of Israel—that Jesus considered Himself sent.<sup>1</sup> Among these normally religious men individuals naturally enough stood out as more religious than others. The chosen twelve were specially religious men, if we may judge from the fact—disclosed in the Fourth Gospel—that Peter and Andrew and Philip were originally disciples of John the Baptist.<sup>2</sup> The Pharisees, too, were religious men.

And all these, of course, were religious in a Jewish way, not in a Greek way. That is to say, those to whom Jesus came no more dreamed than Jesus Himself ever dreamt, of restricting the area of divine action, or the area of religion at all, to some sphere defined as “spiritual” in the sense of non-bodily. Every good thing—whether in the life of the soul or in the life of the body—came from God, and was recognised as so coming. It is on this account that the behaviour of Jesus as a healer of disease implied, and necessarily implied, a claim to a religious authority—and therefore to a religious character and function—which differed in kind from that claimed, or till then conceivable as being claimed, by any human

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xv. 24; *cf.* Mark vii. 27.      <sup>2</sup> John i. 40.

being. It is on this account that it is evidently true to say that by the mere manner of His healings Jesus offered Himself as the object of religious faith. For, in this connection, it is not only the healing work of Jesus, but also the manner of that work that calls for notice.

With the exception of one special class, the cures of Jesus appear to have been without parallel in Palestine. The exception, however, is instructive. From St. Matthew and St. Luke as well as from the Acts of the Apostles we learn that there were among the Jews those who practised exorcism.<sup>1</sup> Yet St. Mark and St. Luke declare that when Jesus healed a demoniac in the Synagogue at Capernaum the multitude were astonished and said one to another, "What is this? With authority He commandeth the unclean spirits and they obey Him."<sup>2</sup> It was not the fact merely, but the *manner* of the exorcism that impressed the people. Other exorcists drove out demons in the name of God. Jesus expelled them by His bare command. In so doing He challenged religious faith.

It should be noticed that such a view is not one imposed upon the Gospel texts, but one dictated by them. We can go further. The exorcisms of Jesus were not only in intention, but in effect, a challenge to religious faith. They not only aimed at raising the question of religious authority, they actually did so. The Pharisees never questioned the genuineness of His demoniac cures. That is immensely clear. Equally evident, but of infinitely greater import, is the fact that it never so much as occurred to them to question the supernatural character of those healing acts.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 27; Luke xi. 19; Acts xix. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Mark i. 27; Luke iv. 36.

Why, then, did they challenge them at all? It was, I sometimes think, because for one dizzy moment the awful alternative was presented to their shrinking gaze. They had a dim yet vivid sense—and the shock of it was nothing less than terrific and breath-snatching—that this strange Man of Nazareth who by His simple unsupported word expelled the evil spirits and restored men to their proper selves, was, in that moment and by that very act, striking the high-hung shield of God Himself.

Who could blame them for their horror-struck repudiation of such an acted claim as that? Certainly Jesus did not blame them. Those who should speak a word against the Son of Man should have forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> But, alas! the Pharisees were faced with a dilemma of the most testing kind. To them much had been given and of them much was now required. The issues dependent upon their decision were nothing less than awful. It was not just their own position that was here at stake, it was the Pharisaic faith itself.

For the Pharisees, it must be remembered, claimed a divine sanction for their interpretation of the sacred Law. Through them the life of all the pious in Israel was to be brought into conformity in all its details with the revelation of the Divine will of which the Law was the living source. That revelation, because divine, was inexhaustible. These wise Scribes brought out of their sacred treasures things which, though in appearance new, were in deeper reality old—old as Sinai itself. They sat in Moses' seat. Upon them and upon their teaching depended for its maintenance and growth the religious practice of the chosen people, their continued communion with God. They

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 10.



were authoritative teachers, and their authority rested upon the broadest base both of general acceptance and approval and of historical credentials of the most august kind. Who can blame them if they recoiled in horror before One who at once assumed and exercised an authority of a higher order than their own, and who not only spoke but acted with authority and power, in His own person, and without appealing even to God Himself? It was a searching test ; and the test found them wanting. For they maintained the Pharisaic faith in outward form only by betraying it in substance.

At the heart of Israel's faith was the conviction that every good and perfect gift is from above. A good and perfect act was performed before their very eyes, an act whose goodness was beyond denial. In desperation they asserted that that life-giving act of exorcism was the work not of God but of Beelzebub. More than that, they used their authoritative position as divinely accredited teachers to impose upon the people whom God had committed to their guidance a lie of the most heinous kind.

There is no stronger testimony to the manifestly supernatural character of Jesus' healing work than the desperate means to which His most obstinate opponents thus resorted in the endeavour to obliterate the claim which they, at least—if no one else—dimly perceived to be implied. It is one of the curiosities of criticism that those who refuse to accept this Pharisaic testimony to the supernatural claim underlying the healing work of Jesus, and who thereby impute to the Pharisees a malice purely self-regarding, are usually the very people who assert that Jesus' own invective against the Pharisees was misdirected and unfair. It is surely more correspondent to the facts,



and more just to both parties in the case, to believe that that bitter denunciation proceeded upon the principle that to whom much is given of him much will be required. It was because the Pharisees had faith in God, in God as the true Author of all good, that they were judged—and rightly judged—by the highest standard. The short-circuiting of faith is one thing; the denial of the faith you have is quite another. “Whoso shall speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him, but whoso calumniates the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness.”<sup>1</sup>

The works of healing, then, which Jesus undoubtedly performed, constituted in themselves at once an appeal and a challenge to religious faith. Quite apart from any specific claim or title, these works of power, considered—as they should be—in their manner as well as in their matter, not only invite, but necessitate the conclusion that this Man claimed a religious authority—and therefore a religious character and function—which differs not in degree merely but in kind from that claimed by any other figure in history.

But there remains, in close connection with this implicit claim, so utterly unique in character, a claim more explicit in kind and of a nature even more astonishing. The Man Jesus forgave the sins of other men.

Think what that means. In the parable which of all the parables of Jesus is perhaps the most enthralling, the son who had left his father’s home and set up for himself on his father’s bounty in a distant land and had there fallen on evil days remembered the comforts of his home and determined to return. “I will arise and go unto my

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 10.

father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And the father is vividly depicted as having one thought and one only—that his dear son is home again.<sup>1</sup> That is a picture of the astonishing love of God for sinful men. Only Jesus could have put it quite like that. And yet the thought itself, as such, was nothing new. It was already the teaching of the Pharisees themselves that upon repentance God was willing and eager to forgive. That was a truism and not a blasphemy.

But who except God Himself could judge repentance? Yet Jesus judged the repentance of the man with the palsy. According to the Pharisees He did more. He deliberately forgave the man Himself. In that case—and in that case alone—their comment was thoroughly in point. For it was a scandalous word, coming from human lips.

Yet somehow (except to the Pharisees who, as the instructed leaders of Israel—God's holy congregation—seized vividly the claim implied) this word of Jesus did not give offence; somehow the burdened and the sinful were not scandalised but glad. This deceiver was dreadfully convincing with His sure touch and His easy manner of authority. As His enemies may well have put it, He carried things off well. So well, that the common people contrived to take Him at His word, and, in practice, actually to believe that Jesus could fill the place that belonged of right to God alone. It must have seemed all but vain even to make a protest. Yet the Pharisees *did* protest with vigour: "This man blasphemeth: who can forgive sins but God only?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke xv. 11-32.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ii. 7.

Once more, then, Jesus certainly created for the Pharisees a situation of the most devastating kind. Certainly they deserved consideration, for their scruples were thoroughly in place. And Jesus recognised the fact. He offered them a sign. Not indeed a sign of their own choosing—yet a sign which, on the Pharisaic premise that God, and God alone, is the author of all good, ought to have been sufficient even in so high an emergency as this—sufficient at least to make them suspend judgment. Jesus conceded the point which was in His critics' minds. It was easy enough to use words of forgiveness. Yet who was to know that they were words of power? "But that ye may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins—Arise, take up thy pallet and walk home."<sup>1</sup> At once—and even we, with our jaded imaginations, can perceive how electrifying must have been the spectacle—the helpless cripple rose, shouldered his bed, and walked out before them all.

Now it has been growing on me as this chapter shaped itself on paper and the Subject of the Gospel portrait began to loom with an increasingly enthralling vividness before my mind and heart, that the author of that other Gospel—so different in many ways from the synoptic three, yet so undeniably portraying the same Person—wrote with a sure and daring touch. Only so—with the evidence of written gospels there before him—could that evangelist have ventured to speak so bluntly as he does of Jesus' acts of power as being "signs."<sup>2</sup> For was it not precisely one of the chief reproaches levelled by Jesus at the Pharisees, and indeed at His contemporaries as a whole, that they sought after a sign, and did He not declare that

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> John ii. 11.

no sign should be given them ?<sup>1</sup> It is true enough. The fact is patent.

But reflection shows that it is not the whole truth, and it is the whole truth that men are concerned to know. Especially is it our concern who seek to see the Gospel portrait, to see it steadily and see it whole. We must remember then how it is also true that Jesus reproved the Pharisees on the specific ground that, while they had no difficulty in seeing in the budding trees a sign of the approach of summer, they failed signally and disastrously to read the signs of their own times.<sup>2</sup> It is also true that He pronounced a formidable doom upon Chorazin and Bethsaida for no other reason than that they had witnessed with unmoved hearts His mighty acts.<sup>3</sup> Capricious and unreasonable ? No—this Man is not beside Himself. There is a method in this madness.

Some people have charged Jesus with recklessness, but—although criticisms of the most opposite kinds have constantly been levelled against Him—no one has ever yet ventured to contend that He erred on the side of caution. He has been accused of being in various directions too extreme, but no one has suggested that he was in any direction moderate. Yet the fact remains that He never puts Himself into a false position. Thus He Himself did not argue from prophecy. Indeed He never argued at all. And the real meaning of His refusal to give a sign upon demand was that He would not stoop to submit His claim to human judgment, would not recognise for a single instant the right of men to dictate His actions or prescribe His course.

He would give signs and did ; but they should be signs

<sup>1</sup> Mark viii. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxi. 29-31.

<sup>3</sup> Luke x. 13 f.

of His own choosing, in His own time and manner. He never made the least attempt to win men's favour. At every turn the initiative was with Him. In all His public acts He was throwing down a challenge. And even of His signs it is true to say that, like His teaching, they are subordinated to Himself. In the end He is His own sign to the world.

The prophetic words of aged Simeon spring spontaneously to the mind. "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel and for a sign that shall be spoken against."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the claims of Jesus, however persistently gainsaid, still retain their ancient quality of challenge. He has not ceased to be significant. The Gospel picture itself is as vivid to-day as when it was first painted. And as men throng around that masterpiece and, before a sincere and level gaze, the picture quickens into life, their self-sufficiency is strangely shaken. They have come so confidently to pass judgment on the picture. Can it be that the picture is passing judgment upon them?

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 34.

## THE UNIQUE FIGURE

### CHAPTER III

#### HIS IMPACT

To every one who gazes sincerely at the Gospel picture and allows it to absorb him there is bound to come, at one moment or another, a conviction which, once born, is indestructible. In that moment something fresh is woven for good or ill into the fabric of his life, so that his world will never be quite the same again. For he himself is altered. What is that something? It is hard to say. Certainly it is more than an intellectual conviction, more than a moral judgment, more than an æsthetic intuition. A word is needed which will cover every one of these yet attach itself exclusively to none, and will at the same time possess a distinctive flavour of its own. That word exists, but it is charged with associations surpassingly august. I wish to use it here in the loose yet vivid sense which it has in the current speech of everyday life.

Put it in this way. A person with whom you have been long acquainted, and whom you think you know, may, one fine morning, utterly scatter all your quiet assumptions by an action completely out of character. In such circumstances nine men out of ten are certain to exclaim that to them that action was a revelation. They feel that they had never known their friend before. They feel also that they do know him now. It is as if they had been all their life living with that man in a dark room



and then a blind was suddenly rolled up. In one way their friend remains just as he was before. In another and infinitely more important way he has become to them another man. It is in this sense that the word revelation will be employed in the present context.

It should now be possible, after this rather laboured explanation, without fear of misunderstanding, to repeat in an amended form the assertion with which this chapter began. To every one who gazes sincerely at the Gospel picture and allows it to absorb him there is bound to come, at one moment or another, a *revelation* from whose illumination he will never afterwards be able entirely to escape.

It may perhaps be permitted to elaborate an analogy that is actually rather apt. Most men have lived with Jesus in a darkened room. They suppose that they know all about Him, or at least that they know sufficient for all ordinary purposes of acquaintance. And it is certainly true that knowledge of some kind they must have already if this particular revelation is to flash upon their hearts and minds. That action, for example, which in the eyes of his friends transfigured the man of our illustration, to a pure stranger might well have been without significance, might indeed have escaped notice altogether. For the stranger neither knows nor cares to know.

But there is a further point which our illustration serves to make. Clearly a revelation of a personal character, to be properly revealing, must be a revelation to oneself. All that can be done by a third party is to call attention to the revealing fact. It is the whole purpose of the present book to play the part of that third party. The rest lies

between the reader and the Gospel portrait. That portrait is a most convincing picture. But it can convince only at first hand. Every genuine enthusiast for Jesus Christ knows that.

But what is this "particular revelation" to which in these opening chapters it is hoped to call attention? Simply this—that the Gospel portrait, self-authenticating as it is, is the portrait of One who differs *infinitely*, differs not in degree but in kind, from any other inhabitant of this our human world.

Already perhaps, as we have contemplated it together, that picture has begun to yield up something of its secret to our spellbound souls. We have withdrawn to ponder and returned to gaze. With what result? The question can be answered in a sentence. Some one has swum into our ken who makes habitually what by every law of human custom should be most arrogant assumptions, without a trace of arrogance. The conclusion is inevitable. Superior persons are so very odious because comparisons are odious. Jesus is not odious because between Him and other men there is simply no comparison. He is manifestly *sui generis*—a Man who is a pattern without being a prig.

It is a baffling picture, but not a problem picture. Rather it is a triumphant work of art. The whole thing is perfectly in drawing. Transcendent assumptions are matched by towering claims. What is more, the towering claims cause no more scandal than the arrogant assumptions. He proposes Himself as an object of religious faith, and we are not the least affronted. He claims to heal and to forgive, and the most natural protests of the Pharisees appear pedantic or malicious. It really is

astonishing the way this picture so satisfies the human heart that men like Renan can forget its ringing challenge in its appealing charm.

For the Gospel portrait has not only charm but power. It not only attracts : it kindles and subdues. Something perhaps has been already done towards substantiating such a claim. But clearly there is much more in this picture than has yet been seen. All that has so far been attempted has been to isolate two main aspects for consideration and then to return with fresh light to contemplate the picture as a whole.

Both these aspects, however, have been provided by the public life of Jesus—His carriage and behaviour as He moved through curious, expectant crowds. If the whole force of the Gospel record is to make its impression on the mind and heart, it will be necessary to consider the Subject of that record in the light of His more intimate relationships. So far as the Synoptic Gospels are concerned, the task is not easy. For it was the aim of the first three Evangelists to depict a public ministry. Nevertheless to those who approach their pages with a definite question in their minds these Gospels prove surprisingly instructive even on points with which they do not profess to deal directly. What impression did Jesus make upon His intimates, and more especially upon that inner circle of twelve men with whom for months He walked and ate and slept? That is the question which this chapter is concerned to put.

Now the only competence which the present writer dares to claim for inflicting a fresh book about the Gospels on an indulgent public is that it has been his happy lot to spend some months precisely in directing the attention of

students to the Gospel record. It is his conviction that if only people will approach those records with definite questions in their minds they will find answers which really dazzle. They will feel that they are then seeing the Gospels as they are for the first time. And the result of that vision will be to shatter prejudices and evoke surprise and wonder. If Renan, and indeed many a more orthodox inquirer, had approached the Gospels with a question instead of an assumption the world might have been saved a lot of barren trouble. Let us then approach the Gospels with this particular question in our minds and see whether we are not drawn to a conclusion of a somewhat unexpected kind.

The first witness to be called is naturally John the Baptist—he from whom St. Mark's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles date “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

Whatever his limitations, the Baptist was a spirit of no common rate. The last of the prophets had been dead for centuries when John assumed the disused mantle and appeared before his countrymen in that tremendous rôle. The Jewish nation was electrified by the bare fact of his appearance in that ancient guise. As a distinguished scholar shrewdly observed in Oxford, it was as though a man should appear to-day clad in armour riding down the “High.” That spectacle would, however, be dismissed—in modern Oxford—as a masquerade. John's appearance brooked no such dismissal. His prophetic tones had the authentic ring. Not even the Pharisees were spared. “Begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father ; for I say unto you that God is

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 1, 2 and 4 ; *cf.* Acts i. 21 f.

able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees : every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.”<sup>1</sup> Stimulating words ! But the main burden of his message was more terrific still. He proclaimed the imminent coming of some Mighty One, whose sandal thong he himself was not worthy to unloose. That Mighty One would judge and sift God’s people, baptizing them not with water but with Holy Spirit and with fire.<sup>2</sup>

To such a man came Jesus from Nazareth to be baptized. St. Mark and St. Luke record only the bare fact. The First Gospel adds that John, aghast at the proposal, protested that he ought to be baptized by Jesus rather than Jesus be baptized by him.<sup>3</sup> The authenticity of this saying is commonly suspected. The words, it is held, represent what the evangelist thought that John ought to have said. In reality he said nothing of the kind. Although a person of spiritual insight beyond the ordinary, John saw Jesus only as one man among others. So we are expected to believe. But it is a little disconcerting that another word of John is regarded with some favour. Before Jesus began His public ministry proper John had been thrust into prison by Herod Antipas. Thence he sent messengers to Jesus with this question : “ Art thou the Coming One, or do we look for another ? ”<sup>4</sup> The words are held to be authentic because they exhibit the imprisoned Baptist in a mood of despondency. Yet these words themselves throw a ray of light upon the impression made by Jesus on contemporaries in the early stages of His ministry ; for they

<sup>1</sup> Luke iii. 8 f.

<sup>2</sup> Luke iii. 16 f.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. iii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Luke vii. 19.

show that it had at least *occurred* to John to identify Jesus with that Mighty One whose coming he had been commissioned to proclaim. Jesus, that is to say, could be identified by John with one who was to come, winnowing-fan in hand, to cleanse his threshing-floor, gathering the wheat into his garner and burning the chaff with unquenchable fire. If that is so, there was a side to Jesus that so far we have hardly noticed. There must have been about Him something other than attractive grace, something that quelled and awed.

Now the moment this fact is pointed out the Gospel picture begins to change and glow. It does not lose its old appealing grace, yet there is disclosed a fascination of a more mysterious kind. The picture is different, yet recognisably the same. Certain lights, unobserved before, stand out in sharp relief. It is already with quickened apprehensions that we look towards the chosen Twelve to see whether Jesus made any such impression upon them.

That Jesus proposed Himself as an object of religious faith we know already. But what kind of religious faith—faith in Himself only as powerful to heal the body and to cleanse the soul, or faith also in Himself as a Being mysterious, subduing, Divine? The question once fairly raised attracts into consciousness one scene after another which until then had lain dormant in the mind.

Perhaps the first scene that recurs to memory in this way is an occasion when Jesus was alone with His disciples.<sup>1</sup> He was asleep in the stern of a small boat. Suddenly one of those terrible squalls that vex the Sea of Galilee arose with fury. Among these disciples were fishermen skilled

<sup>1</sup> Mark iv. 35-41.



from their youth up in seamanship. Their expert knowledge made them certain that the boat must founder. In real panic they woke their Master roughly with something like a reproach—"Carest Thou not that we perish?" In a flash Jesus was alive to the position. Unflurried, He rose to His feet, rebuked the wind, and bade the sea be quiet. And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. And Jesus said to them, "Why are ye so cowardly? Have ye not yet faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

That that scene was drawn from life does not admit of reasonable dispute. I do not wish at this point to press the miracle. Call it for the moment a coincidence—though you will have to multiply coincidences rather. But the point that immediately needs pressing is the question Jesus asked, "Have ye not yet faith?" What did He mean by that? Faith in God? That is the answer which is usually regarded as adequate to give to such a question. But do those who regard that answer as sufficient really think that Jesus believed that God never allowed mariners to perish? Perhaps it will be retorted that the disciples as repentant men were immune from accidents like those which befell those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell. It seems to me immensely more probable that Jesus was asserting that no calamity could overtake Himself, that His life was the immediate care of God, that He was beyond the threat of evil, unless and until He should invite its onrush of His own free will. "Have ye not yet faith?" Do they not yet, after all these days of intimacy, understand that their Master is not as other men? That certainly is how

the disciples understood the question. Whatever modern commentators think about it, those expert sailors did not regard the sudden calm as a happy coincidence. Moreover, if such it was, Jesus can hardly escape the charge of having made dishonest capital out of that coincidence. However—answer these questions as you will—one thing stands out. Once their natural fears had been relieved by the sudden calm, a terror of quite another kind took possession of the disciples' minds. "*And they feared exceedingly and said to one another, Who then is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*" Dr. Rawlinson's comment seems to be thoroughly in point. "The words express the trouble and perplexity of men who thought they knew their Master, and now find that they do not know Him as they supposed." It thus appears that chief among the impressions made by Jesus upon His most intimate disciples was an impression of religious awe—an impression of the supernatural.

Another story, not so vivid perhaps in its details as this Marcan narrative, yet even more arresting in its concluding words, is recorded by St. Luke.<sup>1</sup> Two empty boats were moored by the lake side, one of which belonged to Simon Peter. Jesus requested Simon to take Him out a little from the shore that He might teach the crowd in comfort from the boat. "And when He had finished speaking He said to Simon, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon replied, Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing : but at Thy word I will let down the nets. And when they had so done they enclosed a great multitude of fishes. . . . And when Simon Peter saw it he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying,

<sup>1</sup> Luke v 1-11.

*Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was amazed.*"

Here it seems we have another coincidence—one also again which imposes upon an expert witness. But here, once more, it is not so much the remarkable event as the astonishing impression which it produces that calls for notice. "Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord !" Why should the sight of such a lot of fishes remind a fisherman of his sins ? The answer, strange as it may at the first glance appear, is that the sight does not remind Simon of his sins at all. His words have no direct connexion with remembered moral failings. They are the words of a mortal man shrinking before the supernatural made manifest. Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' knees just as Elijah fell upon his face when, after the fire and the wind and the earthquake there came a still, small voice. The words, "Depart from me ; for I am a sinful man, O Lord," are strictly parallel with the words of the prophet Isaiah when in the Temple he saw the Lord high and lifted up. "Woe is me ! I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."<sup>1</sup> Peter's words, like Isaiah's, are something more, something other than a confession of sin ; they are the involuntary cry of humanity shrinking before the supernatural made manifest. If we ask what was the fundamental impression made by Jesus upon His most intimate and favoured followers the answer is plain. It was an impression of religious awe.

It is worth while remarking that of these two arresting

<sup>1</sup> Isa. vi. 5.

narratives one is Marcan in origin and the other peculiar to St. Luke. The First Gospel is suspect to most critics because it is in several points inclined to emphasise the supernatural more than the other two evangelists. This is, in its own place, a perfectly reasonable criticism, but it ought not to be used to discredit St. Matthew in advance as incorrigibly tendentious. No gospel could be more supernatural than St. Mark already is. There is really no reason whatever for discounting matter peculiar to St. Matthew on the bare assumption that he had such a taste for the supernatural as must render his witness unreliable. For example, it is surely all but certain that the words recorded by the First Evangelist alone as spoken to Peter upon his confession of Jesus' Messiahship are equally authentic with any other words of Jesus that we possess. "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven."<sup>1</sup> These marvellous words completely harmonise with the narratives of St. Mark and St. Luke which we have just considered and with the Gospel picture as a whole. It is simply ludicrous to picture the Galilean fisherman as "puzzling it all out" as an intellectual problem, adding two and two together, and drawing from logical premises a logical conclusion. The apostles were not occupied in framing conceptions; they were absorbing or rather being absorbed by an overmastering impression. This word of Jesus in St. Matthew's Gospel is but the obverse of the Johannine saying, "Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."<sup>2</sup> It was not flesh and blood that

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 17.<sup>2</sup> John xiv. 9.

revealed to Peter the Christhood of his Master—not even ultimately the flesh and blood of that Master Himself—it was the Father in Heaven present in His Incarnate Son. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no time to linger over the tremendous scene of the Transfiguration, which Mr. Middleton Murry dismisses with the statement that “it seemed to them” (the three apostles) “that His face was changed.” Even so, it is admitted by the same writer that “they were beside themselves with fear.” The immediate point which becomes almost monotonously clear is that on every one of the occasions on which the impression made by Jesus upon His most intimate followers is recorded in the Synoptic Gospels it is an impression of *fear*—an impression, that is, of something in Him mysteriously awful, transcendently Divine.

Sometimes, it would appear, a similar though slighter impression was made by Jesus upon comparative strangers. The people of Gadara, we are told, when they saw Jesus, were afraid: “And they began to beseech Him to depart out of their coasts.”<sup>2</sup> Again, the people of Nazareth wished to seize Him and hurl Him headlong from the rock on which their city was built, “but He, passing through the midst of them, went His way.”<sup>3</sup> And when Jesus descended from the Mount of Transfiguration, “the whole crowd, seeing Him, was amazed.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, such experiences as these do not lend themselves readily to the tongue. Indeed they do not lend themselves to intellectual formulation at all. In the Gospel narratives they are recorded only as it were incidentally, in connexion

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 16; Mark viii. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Luke iv. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Mark v. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Mark ix. 15.

with specific events. On that account they are easily passed over and their true significance is frequently unrecognised. Nevertheless, there they are, and once attention has been called to them, they acquire a significance out of all proportion to the space which they occupy in the narrative as a whole. Especially apt in this connexion is a solitary verse in St. Mark's Gospel. I quote it without comment. "And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem ; and Jesus was going before them : and they were amazed ; and they that followed were afraid." <sup>1</sup>

*And they were afraid !* We have made it our business in this chapter to approach the Gospels with a definite question in our minds—What impression did Jesus make, in the days between the opening of the public ministry and the final visit to Jerusalem, upon the minds and hearts of His most intimate followers and friends ? The answer which the Gospels are unanimous in returning is perhaps an unexpected one, but there is no doubt at all what that answer is. They were afraid. They spontaneously recognised in Jesus a transcendent, an other-worldly, a Divine significance before which they were humbled and struck with awe.

It remains to add one short note before bringing this chapter to an end. We have reached a point in our study of the Gospel portrait at which it becomes a matter of the first necessity to remember what precisely we are engaged in doing. We are looking at a picture, seeking to see it steadily and see it whole. So far, three aspects—one after another—have been studied, but they are aspects only. If the picture is to remain a picture and not sink to the level of a mere pattern those aspects must be subordinated

<sup>1</sup> Mark x. 32.



to the picture as a whole. They may only too easily be mistaken for the picture itself. This is especially the case when an aspect which has hitherto escaped notice is unexpectedly thrust upon the mind. It is therefore really urgent to remember that this mysterious, terrifying Jesus, who may conceivably in this chapter have loomed for the first time before our startled gaze, is the same Jesus who took the children up into His arms, invited the weary, and came to save the lost. It is indeed precisely in this harmonious combination of apparent opposites that the enthralling charm and signal vigour of the Gospel portrait alike consist. Surrender one aspect to the other and both charm and vigour fade. Without the marvellous, Jesus would become the unreal idyllic figure of popular sentiment : without the homely, the stark portent of the ultra-apocalyptic school. The truth of this is self-evident when it has once been stated. It was stated some sixteen centuries ago. "*Who, although He be God and Man : yet He is not two, but one Christ.*"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Athanasian Creed.

## THE UNIQUE FIGURE

### CHAPTER IV

#### HIS CLAIM

It requires a real effort of attention even to begin to see the Gospels as they really are. For this picture, like all supreme pictures, makes a demand on the beholder. Yet the effort is utterly worth while and receives a reward that exceeds all expectation.

It cannot indeed be that the picture will yield up its full secret in a moment. Yet it is perhaps not entirely presumptuous to hope that for some at least the Gospel portrait has already begun to glow with unsuspected life. Even so, granted a lifetime's study and an insight of the first order, there will always remain a hinterland, mysterious and beckoning, yet unexplored. For all the sureness of their touch the Evangelists themselves paint with a trembling brush. Their supreme triumph is to convince us beyond doubting of that fact. The Subject manifestly transcends His portrait as Nature transcends Art.

With this thought dominant in heart and mind let us try to gather up in a few sentences the gains that our study has already brought. Jesus is revealed in the Gospel picture as One who made the most staggering assumptions about His own character in the most unassuming way. From all with whom He came into contact He claimed absolute devotion to Himself. He challenged religious

faith as One with whom all things were possible. Upon those who shared His daily life He produced an impression of sheer super-nature. And with it all He was the most friendly and approachable of men.

At this point the question is bound to present itself as to what conception Jesus had of His own person. Whom did He make Himself? In attempting here to find the answer to this question there are two lines of approach which it is not proposed to use. In the first place, strictly Messianic and apocalyptic claims will be for the present left out of account on the ground that such claims as these are concerned rather with the work than with the person of the historical Jesus. In the second place, no attempt whatever will be made to analyse the self-consciousness of Jesus Himself in this particular regard, for the simple reason that an ordinary human consciousness defies analysis, even in the case of a living contemporary of our own, ready to submit to question. For the analysis of the self-consciousness of Jesus we have no data whatsoever.

But in that case, it may be asked, what does there remain for us to do? It remains to approach the Gospels with the ancient question in our minds—Whom did Jesus make Himself? The moment that we do so it becomes clear that whenever Jesus did speak directly of Himself He spoke in mysterious tones. Not only so, He spoke habitually of the Majesty on High—the Father which is in *Heaven*—with a familiarity which on any other lips than His would appear both irreverent and vulgar. Yet when He speaks in this way we are not even startled. “Blessed art thou, Simon,” said Jesus to Peter, “for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is

in Heaven.”<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to imagine any Christian saint—let alone any Jewish saint—as speaking *in the third person* of the Eternal God and calling Him “My Father.” We are so accustomed—through the teaching of the Church and her Gospels—to think of God as Fatherly and as the Father of all men, that we forget that it does not (and should not) come naturally to us to say “My Father,” except with the implicit and exultant recognition that He may be so addressed solely “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” It is on this account that we often completely miss the full significance of this, the habitual phrase of the historical Jesus. It is on this account that we do not even notice that Jesus habitually speaks as though He had God for His Father in a sense which was not true of other men as such.

We talk gaily of Jesus of Nazareth as bursting into a dark world with “a new idea of God,” and never stop to ask whether in this, as in all His other teaching, He is not rather the source of a divine revelation than the servant of an inspiring idea. We observe appropriately how such talk must have shocked the unenlightened Jew, and never suspect that it ought to be a shock to us as well—an awakening shock, an illuminating shock, a vivifying shock, but a shock none the less. As it is, we have already, in His habitual use of the phrase, “My Father,” as a synonym for Almighty God, a hint of the estimate which Jesus formed of His own person.

Apart from such indirect allusions to the real nature of His identity, the Jesus of the Synoptic records relies rather upon His silent personal influence, the appeal of His undefined yet arresting offers, and the witness of His

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 17.

mighty works. It is very rare for Him to call attention in so many words to the mystery of His person. It is a matter of real joy to Him that His apostle should discern in Himself the long-promised Christ of God. Yet He does not call Himself Messiah in so many words. Nevertheless, from time to time He employs an unprecedented title, and in an association inconceivably august. He adopts a name for His own proper use and links it with the Name of God Himself. If God is "the Father," Jesus is "the Son."

There are three passages in the Synoptic Gospels in which Jesus speaks of Himself in this way. The first occurs in the apocalyptic chapter of St. Mark. The verse in question has about it a specially authentic ring. It follows immediately the famous words—"Heaven and earth shall pass away but My words shall never pass away"—in which we seem to catch the very inflexion of the voice of Jesus, and the passage itself imputes to Jesus an ignorance which no one writing in a "dogmatic" interest would have been likely to allow Him. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father."<sup>1</sup> Not only does Jesus here speak of Himself absolutely as "the Son." As Son, He attributes to Himself a place above the angels in heaven.

Now such a claim is inconceivable on any lips but those of Jesus. Ransack all history and you will find none who would not cower with shame to use about himself language anywhere approaching this. It is really frivolous to brush such words aside. Anyone with any sense of the proportion of things is bound in reason to take account of

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 32.

them. And once the effort is seriously made, it will not prove possible to give any account of them but one.

It is not as though the claim itself came awkwardly or boastfully from the Carpenter of Nazareth. Coming from Him, such words do not strike one as full of sound and fury. Do they not rather harmonise with the whole amazing picture that challenges our breathless and absorbed attention? Is it not almost criminal to dismiss it all with a wave of the hand as a "proof text"? For it is surely in just such words as these that we find the clue we have so long been seeking. In their light not the Gospel portrait only, but the Subject of that portrait becomes a substantial and assured reality, a person, breathing, concrete, and alive—a being indeed beyond our comprehension, yet One whom even a little child can understand.

The second passage in which the title "Son" occurs stood almost certainly in that ancient document from which it is believed that the First and Third Evangelists derived the greater part of the words of Jesus which they have handed down. A passage of some length, it appears in a form practically word for word identical in St. Matthew and St. Luke. St. Luke also gives the context in which the words were spoken and for that reason it is his account which it is proposed to follow here.<sup>1</sup>

The Seventy disciples had returned from their mission announcing exultantly that in the name of Jesus the very demons had proved subject to them. They found that their Master was already conscious of their success. He declared that He had Himself in spirit beheld Satan fall from heaven; at the same time He assured the disciples

<sup>1</sup> Luke x. 17-24.



that He had given them authority over all the power of the enemy and that nothing should have power to hurt them. Nevertheless they had greater cause for joy than their victory over the spirits of evil : the true source of exultation should be the knowledge that their names were written in heaven.

It was characteristic of Jesus that in that hour of triumph He should point his followers away from the earth to heaven—characteristic, too, that whither He pointed He Himself should follow. “ And in that hour,” adds the Evangelist, “ He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said : I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for such was Thy good pleasure.” Then follow immediately the marvellous words—spoken, it would seem, in ecstasy, yet in the hearing of His disciples—a kind of solemn, involuntary meditation—“ ‘ All things have been delivered to Me by My Father : and no one knoweth the Son but the Father ; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.’ And, turning to His disciples, He said privately, ‘ Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see ; for I say unto you that many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not ; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not.’ ”

Blessed indeed ! What are we going to say to these things ? “ The Father ” and “ the Son ” alone have knowledge—knowledge of each other. If “ the Father ” communicates any share of such knowledge to men, He does so through “ the Son.” And “ the Son ” is—the Carpenter of Nazareth.

There remains one further passage—more familiar because at first sight less mysterious—in which Jesus speaks of Himself, though this time in parabolic form, as “the Son,” distinguished as such from all others. It is the parable with which Jesus signed His own death-warrant—the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen.<sup>1</sup> The story is familiar, yet it is worth while quoting it in full.

“A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge about it and digged a pit for the wine-press, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country. And at the season he sent unto the husbandmen a servant that he might receive of the fruits of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant and him they wounded and handled shamefully. And he sent another ; and him they killed ; and many others ; beating some and killing some.”

Now when we remember that the opening phrases of the parable are taken from the fifth chapter of Isaiah, in which Israel is depicted as the vineyard of the Lord,<sup>2</sup> when further it is noticed that the parable was spoken in the hearing of the Pharisees whom Jesus had already denounced as the true descendants of those who had slain the prophets, it can well be imagined with what attention and suspense its recital was followed. To what climax could it all be leading ?

We may fancy, then, that it was with a somewhat heightened tone that Jesus continued. . . . “He had yet one, a beloved son : he sent him last unto them saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir ; come, let us kill him,

<sup>1</sup> Mark xii. 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. v. 1-7.

and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard. What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others."

"When they heard it," adds St. Luke, they said, "God forbid." "But He looked upon them and said, What does the scripture mean, The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner? This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

Now people with unimaginative minds are accustomed to regard this parable as not mysterious but simple. Yet it must surely have stirred the Pharisees to an obscure yet clutching terror. The story as it stands is the classical example of Jesus' parabolic teaching—a tale that any child can follow, yet at the same time a tale that thrills with mysterious meaning. The servants of the parable are, of course, the prophets of Israel's golden age—Jeremiah shamefully mishandled, Isaiah sawn asunder, and, in the last days, John the Baptist, beheaded without a protest from the leaders of religion. But who is it that is here contrasted with the prophets—the beloved Son of the great King? Who is it whom He sends in the expectation that He will command reverence from those to whom He comes? The Pharisees must have had some vivid, however dim, perception of what this incredible village carpenter was claiming. And they recoiled in horror. It was more than envy—it was *fear* that made these men, who were traditionally averse from violence, determine to hound this mysterious claimant to His death. This was the heir! If the Pharisees were to retain the proud trust committed to their charge, if they were to continue

as masters in Israel, they must fulfil the parable in condemning Him who spoke it. For the alternative was to salute this Carpenter as the Messiah—the promised Christ of God, before whose advent their authoritative claims must yield. It was an alternative they could not face. As on a previous occasion they were actually driven into open sin. This man had done nothing amiss ; but this man would have to die. Only so could the inheritance be safely theirs.

Perhaps one comment will not seem out of place. The point that vividly emerges from this astounding parable is of precisely the same nature as that which has already in the present chapter aroused our wondering astonishment. It is true that the challenge which Jesus here throws down is thinly disguised, that it is put forward in Messianic terms. He does not, in so many words, assert that He is absolutely “ the Son.” Yet it is a difference in *nature* that He claims. It is not that He has greater authority than the prophets—still less that He is a better man : such considerations of degree are entirely absent from His thought. He does not compare Himself with the prophets. He points out that between the prophets and Himself there is ultimately no comparison at all. They are the servants of the Most High God. Jesus is His Beloved Son. Nevertheless, human pride and self-sufficiency make His rejection inevitable. His death will be the prelude to the destruction of the ancient order, which will be succeeded by a new.

Now to what is all this leading ? If you are one of those unhappy people who have become obsessed with the idea that “ dogmatic ” religious belief exists in its own right ; that it is the baseless fabric of a vision—a noxious fog of

what the lucid eighteenth century used to call "enthusiasm," which clouds the intellect and blunts the keenness of the human spirit; that it has no attachment to the wholesome earth, but simply imprisons luckless souls in a dungeon of their own imagining, a dungeon into which the blessed sunlight of reality can find no entrance and where "nothing is but what is not"—if, I say, you are obsessed by this not unpopular idea, then you will have a ready answer to our question. All this proceeds from "dogmatic presuppositions" and to "dogmatic presuppositions" it returns.

I put this last remark in hypothetical form because, although such people do presumably exist, it is upon the whole improbable that you are of their number. It is very much more likely—in fact it is all but certain—that you are one of those who have missed the full force of the Gospel picture in its clamorous yet tranquil witness to a Person as incredible as Romance and as actual as Life. To you, then, I suggest that this element of mystery and fear, this impression of something, of Someone, awe-inspiring "beyond the reaches of our souls," that all this, as it sprang directly from the Gospel picture, so to that same picture it leads us to return.

It has perhaps by now become apparent that there is about the Subject of the Gospel portrait a certain balance of tremendous opposites. No sooner have we noted His sublime self-confidence than we are struck by His humility; no sooner does a friendliness of demeanour attract than a certain aloofness gives us pause. Yet somehow such opposites cohere without conflicting. It is as if the last word about this Man was neither majesty nor homeliness, but some unique blending of the two

in a mysterious harmony. So frequent, indeed, does this particular experience become as the Gospel picture grows upon us that in time the appearance of any one striking feature tends to create in us the expectation of that other feature which will restore the balance of the whole. It is, of course, an artistic, not a pedantic, balance that results. We are never left with a Figure that is at all conspicuous for mere "manliness and moderation." This balance is mysterious in itself—the startling balance of a paradox: not the fatiguing balance of a mean between extremes.

It is a further illustration of this somewhat peculiar fact that Jesus not only speaks of Himself under the mysterious title of "the Son," but also by another title—*itself* mysterious—of a contrasted character. He commonly speaks of Himself as "the Son of Man." Now what did He mean by that?

That this title has an apocalyptic reference is now generally acknowledged. It is, indeed, in an apocalyptic context that it most frequently occurs in the Gospels. Nevertheless, it cannot be restricted even to a significance so profound and mysterious as that which invests the figure of the Son of Man in Daniel and in the Secrets of Enoch. This contention receives support from the fact that Jesus on more than one occasion used this title in a purely general way, without any explicit apocalyptic reference at all.

It is, however, immensely noteworthy, as Dr. Armitage Robinson has pointed out, that the first occasion on which St. Mark represents Jesus as using the word "Father" in reference to God is in an apocalyptic passage about the "Son of Man." The passage occurs in the eighth



chapter of that Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Jesus has just predicted that the "Son of Man" is to be rejected, to suffer, to die, and then to rise again. He goes on to set forth the way of discipleship as the way of the Cross. Then, in anticipation of the derision or shrinking which such a proposal will invite, He adds the words now to be remarked: "For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this apostate and wicked generation, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." Finally, the entire passage is given a Messianic turn by the concluding promise that some of those who hear shall see before they die, "the kingdom of God arrived in power." Does not this passage, on reflection, suggest that it is in His capacity of "Son of Man" that Jesus speaks of Himself as the Father's Son? It certainly does seem as though He were inviting us to find the basis both of His sonship to God and of His Messiahship in the primary fact that He is Son of Man.

Now at this point it becomes a matter of extreme importance that we should go slowly and not leap flurriedly to weak and premature conclusions. Jesus invites us to find the basis alike of His divine sonship and of His Messianic rôle in the fact that He is the Son of Man. That is not to say that *because* He is Son of Man He is therefore Son to the Eternal God. To say so would be to reverse the ontological primacy. In the order of being, the greater includes the less, not the less the greater. In other words, if the infinite gulf between the creature and the Creator, between the human and the Divine, between mortal, limited, dependent man and the immortal,

<sup>1</sup> Mark viii. 38; ix. 1.

infinite, utterly self-sufficing God, is to be bridged at all, it must be bridged from His side not from ours. If bridged at all it must be bridged by God Himself. The truth of this should be evident even to modern men. To the Jew it was the first assumption of his life.

Jesus, then, was not degrading God when He built His divine sonship and His Messianic character upon the fact that He was Son of Man. He was not degrading God: He was exalting man. The suggestion is that with His arrival on the human scene mankind has reached a dizzy eminence of incredible majesty and power. If He calls attention to His manhood it is because He is no ordinary man—not even in the sense in which the greatest of the prophets were ordinary men.

He is, He says, a man! Well, what else would you expect a Jewish teacher and carpenter to be? Jesus did not deal in truisms. If any other human being of male sex were to assure you that he was a man you would suspect him of being not only a man but also an imbecile.

The fact is that Jesus proclaims what should have been a truism with the air of one who announces a paradox. It is as if it were a matter for profound astonishment that He should be a man at all. The truth would seem to be that, just as, in the later days of His public ministry, Jesus spoke of Himself as "the Son," thus claiming to share uniquely the divine nature of the one only God, so from the beginning of that public ministry did He suggest by His use of the title "Son of Man" that there was about His human nature something mysterious and unique. Precisely as He was "the Son" so was He "the Man."

Nevertheless it is "the Man" whom we first get to know. That is why the Gospels and not the Creeds alone will

ever remain at the heart of Christian life and worship. That is at least part of the reason why Jesus invited men to find in the fact that He is Son of Man the basis alike of His Messianic rôle and of His divine sonship. It is those who had companied from the beginning with the human Jesus who finally went out into the world as the heralds of a divine salvation through His name.

Now Jesus, it will be noticed, did not coin words. Every title which He employed of Himself had existed verbally before. What He did do was to invest such titles with new meaning and to apply them to Himself. Yet none of these titles—Messiah, Righteous Servant, apocalyptic Son of Man—was sufficient for His purpose. Nevertheless, they had to bear on their weak shoulders the weight of His immense significance. Only so could He make Himself intelligible to those to whom He came.

It is clear, however, that some titles would have been more understandable than others. Most intelligible of all would have been the title of Messiah. Yet there was a tendency to put upon this word an interpretation far too narrow. For this reason Jesus normally avoided its use. On the other hand, to speak of Himself as Son of Man in the apocalyptic sense would have been enigmatic to the point of absurdity. He never employs this title with an apocalyptic reference except when addressing those who have already recognised, or at least heard, His Messianic claim. The one title, therefore, that He actually used in the normal course of His ministry was that of Son of Man, employed in a non-apocalyptic sense. Any Jew who regarded Jesus as, at the most, a prophet, would have taken that title in its ordinary sense as the normal periphrasis for "man." Thus Jesus could use that title most accept-

ably of any for three reasons. It was hampered by no narrowing political interpretations, it would not repel men as enigmatic and absurd, yet it would at the same time attract attention and invite surmise about the speaker.

Let us consider three passages in which this title is thus used, for the sake of brevity divorcing the sayings from their context. It will be noticed that instead of substituting "the man" for "the Son of Man," I have employed a periphrasis which, as it seems to me, probably gives a more accurate idea of the impression that would have actually been produced.

"But that ye may know that One who is Man has power on earth to forgive sins. . . ." <sup>1</sup> "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath: therefore I say unto you that One who is Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." <sup>2</sup> "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but One who is Man hath not where to lay his head." <sup>3</sup>

The first saying suggests that with the coming of Jesus a new era has opened for mankind. The second saying carries a similar implication with the further suggestion that this era constitutes no revolution but the actual fulfilment of a purpose always in the mind of God. The third saying hints at the paradox of Jesus' being, who is a stranger upon earth yet its true Lord.

Now is it not true? Do not such words of Jesus as these attract and stir the soul where, before the majesty of the Sole Son of the Lord of Heaven and Earth, it trembles and would withdraw?

Once more, then, it is to be borne in mind that the Gospel portrait is an inimitable whole. There Jesus is

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 9-12.    <sup>2</sup> Mark ii. 24-28.    <sup>3</sup> Luke ix. 58.

revealed as One who made the most staggering assumptions about His own character in the most unassuming way ; as One who claimed absolute devotion to Himself ; as One who challenged religious faith ; as One before whom His most intimate followers were struck with divine fear ; as One who, with all this, was the most friendly and approachable of men.

With every fresh return to that picture it becomes at once more incredible and more convincing. It will always have secrets in reserve. Yet already in response to our grave, impartial study the master-secret must, I think, have flashed upon our hearts and minds. For what else can be the secret of that shattering personality there presented to our gaze than the mystery which has been trumpeted throughout the world ? “ *Very God of Very God, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man.* ” <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Nicene Creed.





*“ It is by no breath,  
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that Salvation joins issue with death ! ”*

BROWNING, *Saul*.

## PART TWO

### THE UNIQUE ACT

#### CHAPTER V

##### THE ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

IT is always a hazardous proceeding to sum up the Gospels in a phrase. So far they have been regarded as a portrait. Nevertheless, the portrait which they compose appears as a portrait of no ordinary kind. It is something other than a product of artistic skill. It has, indeed, been claimed from the start that this portrait is—what other portraits never are—a transcript from the life. The Subject has been represented not as having sat for His portrait, but as having impressed His very self so decisively upon the hearts and minds of men that there has resulted a clear and vivid stamp.

The Gospels, then, are no mere product of reflective genius. They are fragmentary records of an indelible experience. “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled . . . declare we unto you.”<sup>1</sup> These words from the first of the Johannine letters correspond exactly—so the present writer would claim—with the impression produced by the Synoptic Gospels as a whole upon anyone who considers them without *parti pris*.

At this point, however, the conclusion becomes

<sup>1</sup> 1 John i. 1-4.

irresistible that the Gospel, though indeed a portrait, is a portrait only incidentally. It is only necessary to approach it as a portrait in the way that we have so far done for the inadequacy of such a method to reveal itself. But this is not to say that such a method is mistaken. It is certainly the best method of approach—if only that it serves to keep our eye upon the object and encourages an attitude rather of docility than of prejudice. For a portrait—like every other genuine picture—imposes itself and is its own guarantee. A picture, that is to say, is its own defence or condemnation. It exists in its own right. In short, it is best to approach the Gospel as a picture because the Gospel, like a picture, must make its own appeal or be written down a failure.

There is thus a further advantage in the particular method of approach which has been adopted in this book. It imposes a salutary restraint upon the writer. Just in proportion as a man is an artist in his own right or has genuine knowledge of the craft of painting he will, when exhibiting a picture, shrink from demanding of beholders anything else than that they will allow the picture to speak for itself. He may know that picture from within—know not only what it succeeds in doing but what it fails to do. But he will be content to leave all that for the picture itself to say. For the picture exists in its own right. It will reveal its own insufficiency—if such there be—precisely because it is up to a point so marvellously satisfying, incomparably more adequate, despite its failings, to the wonder there depicted, than any words even of the actual artist could possibly be.

Therefore, as showman, the ideal guide directs attention always away from his own opinions or theories to the

picture itself. The picture means more to him, doubtless, than it does to you. But just in so far as he is confident of its being a true picture, a genuine work of art, he will be content, and indeed anxious, to allow it to make its own impression. If it is a picture at all it is a revelation, an effective symbol—it is one with what it tells of. The sooner, therefore, you forget the showman and become absorbed in the picture the better the showman will be pleased.

Now it is the part of showman that this book aspires to play. It is not a work of learning, and not in its first intention an argument ; but an appeal to something that visibly exists and challenges attention. Its object is not so much to tell you what you must see as to suggest to you what to look for, its author being confident that if you will but look you will see for yourself what is there so vividly displayed.

But what, so far, has the picture shown us? It has conjured up before our eyes a breathing Person, a Person of strange contrasts in a stranger unity, a Person paradoxically at once assured and humble, commanding and attractive, stern and tender, self-centred and self-forgetful. Thus unique in Himself, this Person appears also as making unique claims and unique offers—claims and offers which are all seen to be centred in Himself and yet seem fit and graceful. He shows Himself to us as someone serenely self-sufficient, competent, it would seem, to every conceivable emergency, and establishing the genuineness of transcendent claims by signs which brook no question, yet manifestly point beyond themselves. Again, this Person stands against a background, amidst surroundings that reflect Him, for He is the centre

of a group whose members regard Him with expectancy, and frequently with supernatural dread and religious awe. Finally, He Himself put into words a superhuman claim, incredible on any lips but His, yet on His lips not only credible but convincing and illuminating. He claims to be Sole Son to the Eternal God.

So far, then, does our portrait take us. Yet it could not have taken us so far, almost without our noticing, were it not a portrait unique in kind. It has the repose of a great picture; but the repose of this portrait is akin rather to the repose of Nature than to the repose of Art. The tranquil life of any other picture is to the repose of this masterpiece as is the repose of a quiet room to the pulsating serenity of a whole landscape on a summer afternoon. In short, this picture is itself alive. Clearly, this portrait cannot be kept any longer in its frame.

The present chapter, then, marks a transition in our method of approach to the Gospels. We have considered the Gospels as a portrait and contemplated Jesus in Himself as there depicted. That contemplation has been well worth while, but it has become clear—the picture itself has made it clear—that Jesus reveals Himself in action. He did not make it His object so to live as to bequeath to us a picture. He was bent on the achievement of a purpose. What was it that He intended to achieve? Did He, in fact, achieve it? It is with these questions in mind that we have now to make a fresh approach to the Synoptic Gospels.

We do so, however, with a confidence greater than that with which we first began. For we are already at least in process of acquiring that prime requisite for every adventure of the spirit—that which Walter Bagehot so aptly

described as "an experiencing nature." The leaven of the Gospels has begun to work.

Now once the question has been put as to what Jesus in His public ministry was primarily doing, there is one answer that at once suggests itself. Indeed He provides the answer Himself. In the very first chapter of the Marcan story we are told that on the day after His first recorded public appearance—in the synagogue of Capernaum—Jesus rose long before dawn and went out to find a quiet spot where He could pray. Simon and the others discovered His retreat and urged Him to return to the city where His words and His healing work had made a profound impression. To this proposal, however, Jesus replied: "Let us go elsewhere into the next towns and make proclamation there also; for to this end came I forth."<sup>1</sup> It is clear, then, that He came to make a proclamation or an announcement of some kind.

And we know—or should know—what that announcement was. "The Kingdom of God has approached."<sup>2</sup> He does not say: "The Kingdom of God is approaching" (ἐγγιζει), still less, "The Kingdom of God is about to approach," but precisely "The Kingdom of God has approached" (ἤγγικεν). At some point or other, before that proclamation was made, something had already occurred, something had been completed. And now Jesus begins His public ministry by going out to announce the fact. The "Kingdom of God"—whatever that may turn out to be—is already in being. That seems to be the plain sense of the words.

It is true, indeed, that precisely the same Greek verb and tense is used in the Septuagint—the Greek version

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 35-38.

<sup>2</sup> Mark i. 14 f.



of the Old Testament—in translating the phrase in Isaiah lvi. 1—“My salvation *is near to come*.” It is possibly this passage that led our revisers to render the phrase of Jesus, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.” But then, in this passage of Isaiah, the verb is used in an auxiliary way, with an infinitive dependent upon it—“My salvation has approached coming.” Now in Ezekiel vii. 7 the word is used absolutely (as it is in the Gospels) and there we have, “The time is come (ἤκει), the day has approached (ἤγγικεν); where it would seem that “is come” and “has approached” are two ways of saying the same thing. In this case the Gospel phrase may and, I think, should read, “The Kingdom of God is come.” The third passage to which Dr. Swete’s Commentary on St. Mark refers us is Lamentations iv. 18. Here we have “Our time has approached (ἤγγικεν), our days are fulfilled, our time is present (πᾶρεστιν).” These verbs again are clearly synonyms, and on this analogy the Gospel phrase may clearly be translated “The Kingdom of God is present.”

I beg pardon for this digression, but it has not been waste of time if it serves to indicate—as it surely does—that what I have called “the plain sense of the words” is also (as so rarely turns out) the actual sense of them. We shall have occasion to see later that such a reading by no means excludes a future reference. In any case, something that has actually come may well be only just beginning and have a long way to travel before it reaches completion. Nevertheless it does appear that the announcement which Jesus came from Nazareth to make was the astounding announcement, “The Kingdom of God is come, the Kingdom of God is present, the Kingdom of God has drawn near.”

For the moment let us not define the "Kingdom of God" as meaning more or less than that God—"the Most High who ruleth in the kingdom of men"<sup>1</sup>—is now Himself personally engaged in manifesting that sovereignty in action upon earth. It is at this point that the method which our study of the Gospels has so far pursued of approaching them as a portrait before approaching them as a drama begins to vindicate itself. For we shall be in no danger of forgetting what Dr. Schweitzer, to whom every student of the Gospels is so deeply indebted for his stimulating work on the subject of the Kingdom, is yet inclined, for all his perspicacity, to overlook. We shall not forget that Jesus consistently subordinates His teaching to Himself and that He is always and everywhere sharply distinguished from all other teachers by the fact that He is personally integral to all He has to teach. Nor shall we forget—what indeed comes to the same thing in the end—that He offers Himself as an object of religious faith, and invites men to see in Him no mere messenger on the prophetic model, but One in whom God is uniquely active for the deliverance of men from all the ills, whether of body or of soul, by which they are oppressed.

Now the moment that we turn to consider His announcement that the Kingdom of God is present, the parables of Jesus come into view; and with the parables appears also an illuminating fact. They are uttered publicly, but they are explained privately. They are explained to the disciples. The question immediately arises as to who precisely the disciples were, and there is no doubt at all about the answer. The Kingdom is built on faith; and the disciples are those who have believed the Good

<sup>1</sup> Dan. iv. 17.

News that in the Person of Jesus the Kingdom of God is actually present. The disciples, in fact, are actually—in some real though undefined sense—members of a Kingdom that is already in being, and that Kingdom has at least its proximate and effective source and centre in the Man Jesus who has come proclaiming it.

It will appear shortly that in making the bold assertions that Jesus announced the actual presence of the Kingdom of God among men and that of that Kingdom He is Himself the personal source and centre I am not erecting an imposing but precarious structure upon the sole foundation of a disputed exegesis of a single text. I am about to invite you to ponder the Gospels with the definite intention of discovering whether the truth of this interpretation is not written large on every page wherever men turn their eyes to read.

But it may first be well to call attention to the immediate purpose of the present chapter. The main question is what it was that Jesus was engaged throughout His life in doing. The answer is that He was engaged in constituting a new humanity, a new society of men and women, a society to whose existence the presence of Jesus Himself among them is a sheer necessity. Already we have had occasion to observe that Jesus, unlike Gautama, consistently represents Himself as integral to His own teaching. The Kingdom of God as it exists on earth is a personal affair; it lives with the life of Jesus Himself.

And now let us approach the Gospels with the idea in our minds that Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God as already present among men and see whether they do not bear out that contention. Already it has been noticed that the healing works of Jesus—His cures and exorcisms—

pointed beyond themselves. To what, then, did they point? Jesus quite bluntly says that they point to the presence of God's Kingdom already established upon earth. "If I by the finger of God cast out devils," He exclaims, "then the Kingdom of God is come upon you."<sup>1</sup> As we saw before, the exorcisms of Jesus are not so much signs of the Kingdom of God, though they are that: but they are that because they are themselves works of that Kingdom, itself now visibly in the Person of Jesus established upon earth.

In the light of this passage another passage still more famous yields up its meaning. The Pharisees, who looked for a future Kingdom, ushered in by cataclysmic marvels that should strike terror into the hearts of faithless Jews and unbelieving Gentiles, inquired of Jesus when that Kingdom would come. He replied that they would not discover that Kingdom by scouring the heavens with anxious eyes, because as a matter of fact that Kingdom was already in their midst. "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation."<sup>2</sup> They will not be able by close observation to note the exact time of its arrival. Already it has come and they have noticed nothing. "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither will they say (with any reason) Lo, here! or Lo, there! For behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

The Greek preposition can mean either "within you, in your hearts" or "among you, in your midst." But, as Dr. Plummer justly observes in his monumental commentary on St. Luke, "the latter seems to suit the context best; for the Kingdom of God was not in the hearts of

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvii. 20 f.

the Pharisees, who are the persons addressed." He also calls attention to the contrast between "will they say" (the supposition that the Kingdom is still future) and "is" (the fact that it is really present).

There are several other passages which it would be tedious to quote, all of them pointing to the same conclusion. It may perhaps, however, be permitted to inquire why Jesus likens the Baptist to that second Elijah, whose coming was, according to the prophecy of Malachi, to usher in the Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> and why since his days (that is, since the date of the Baptist's imprisonment, which is also the date of the beginning of Jesus' public ministry) the "violent" are able to force their way into that Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Why all this, if that Kingdom is something yet to come?

No. The more you ponder the Gospels the less will you be able to evade the conclusion that Jesus came forth to make one primary announcement—that the Kingdom of God was actually present, already established visibly in His own Person among men.

But why prejudge the question as to what the Kingdom means, by saying that it is already constituted by the very presence of Jesus? Because we have seen that Jesus is integral to His own teaching, because Jesus invited men to recognise in Him One in whom God was uniquely active for the deliverance of men, and because if you do not find the Kingdom there I cannot see where you will find it at all.

This being so, it becomes more evident than ever that Jesus has a further purpose than to show men what God is like. The Kingdom of God is not exhibited *in vacuo*.

<sup>1</sup> Mal. iv. 5 f.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 12-14.



The Kingdom appears, so we have claimed, in the actions of Jesus. But those actions are not directed towards exhibiting the Kingdom: they are not propaganda, they have no ulterior purpose, they are entirely directed to one immediate end. That end is nothing else than the actual extension of the Kingdom of God, the extension of the sphere within which God is Himself now uniquely active upon earth.

The action of Jesus is directed not in the first place towards things but towards persons. That is why Jesus claims religious faith. That is why He makes it so evident that the healing of the body is only incidental to His main function. As St. Paul wrote later, "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> Jesus—Himself, as Man, anointed with the Spirit of God—has come to lift men, through union with Himself, on to a new plane of being. The task of Jesus, in short, is to constitute a new humanity. That new humanity, viewed—as it always has been viewed by those belonging to it—as constituted by Jesus and living by His life, enjoys the title of the Kingdom of God. No reminder that the Kingdom has yet to come "in power"<sup>2</sup> must blind us to the fact that it has already come, and has already a concrete, visible existence, dating at least from the call of Jesus' first disciples, dating actually, indeed, from the first appearance of Jesus Himself upon the human scene.

At this point the wisdom of approaching the Gospels in the first place as a portrait becomes again apparent. The reason why the Kingdom of God remains for many an unconvincing mystery, or merely a noble though

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiv. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ix. 1.



impracticable ideal, is that men have refused to take account of the Jesus of the Gospels as in Himself He so vividly and convincingly appears. Begin with the thought of Jesus as a merely human person, and you are bound to postpone the Kingdom of God indefinitely even if you do not dismiss it as an illusion from the start. The Kingdom of God, as such, is a supernatural creation, and if you place at its centre a man of entirely the same make and pattern as our workaday selves, no matter how much genius and nobility you ascribe to Him, the Kingdom will cease for you to be a divine Kingdom. It will become an ethical association or even an ethical ideal, or else a distant, incredible, magical event.

So we will begin with Jesus as One truly Man indeed, of like passions with ourselves, One in whom are visibly manifest the true lineaments of humanity, yet One in whom God is uniquely active, and who can be finally accounted for in divine terms alone. I invite your attention to the fact that only so, yet certainly so, does the subject of the Gospel portrait become a true Person, credible, appealing, concrete, and alive.

Now the Jesus of the Gospel portrait spoke habitually of the Eternal God by the confident yet astounding title of "My Father." It does not appear that He encouraged anyone else to do the same when speaking of God in the third person. He spoke, indeed, of "Our Father," of "Thy Father," and of "Your Father"; and upon these sayings—with a recklessness that revolts the whole religious sense—people of our own day have built the one doctrine which deserves to be called, with all that unfavourable accent which they are themselves accustomed normally to put upon the word, a "dogma." They assert

that Christianity in a nutshell is "the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Men." The implication is that we have the authority of Jesus for the statement that God, merely by being God, is the universal Father. I do not know of any well-intentioned statement more arbitrary and ill-founded.

That God *desires* to be the Father of all men, that He offers them the gift of sonship, that He has gone the whole way to enable them to receive that gift, all this is true. But it is a *marvellous* truth. Take it as obvious, commonplace, and granted; reduce this shining wonder to a shabby truism, and you rob the truth of all its value by taking up the one attitude which effectually prevents it from ever being realised in your own case, or, what is still more important, in the case of anyone who is deceived by your miserable "gospel."

For if the divine desire is to be realised, men must not so much earn their sonship—indeed they cannot possibly earn it—but they must have some idea of what it is, and some desire for its reception. It is true that "eye hath not seen nor ear heard the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him."<sup>1</sup> But it should at least be clear that—being what it is—the gift cannot be handed, as it were, across the counter, nor credited to us in advance. For, on any view, sonship to the Eternal God must at least involve in genuine recipients a present hope of perfect moral beauty and an outlook upon eternity.

That hope and that outlook can only be received in faith. And faith is not the feverish determination that something *shall* be true; but the whole-hearted and adoring recognition that something, otherwise incredible, *is* true, because

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 9.

God Himself has revealed it to us in substantial, self-evident realities, in terms of flesh and blood.

Jesus, then, did not say that God, by the mere fact of being God, is the universal Father. The Father in Heaven is He from whom all Fatherhood indeed in heaven and earth is named.<sup>1</sup> Yet even a human father is not constituted such by the mere act of generation. Fatherhood is not only a physical but a moral and spiritual fact, and both these before that. Similarly, God is not constituted our Father by Creation, but by Adoption, and He can adopt only those who welcome wonderingly such adoption and desire by His grace to become worthy of so great a gift. Further, He adopts us through His own co-equal and co-eternal Son, who for our sakes became Man.

Anybody, then, who has the faintest idea of the true nature of the Christian faith will know in advance before he turns to the pages of the Gospels that he will find there no hint whatever of this doctrine of promiscuous sonship, supposed to be our assured possession in virtue of the sole fact that we are human beings and as such the creation of God's hand. Nor indeed do we find it there. What we do find is that the one occasion on which God is spoken of as "Our Father" is in the prayer which Jesus gave as a pattern to His own disciples;<sup>2</sup> and that the phrases "Your Father" and "Thy Father" occur only in the "Sermon on the Mount,"<sup>3</sup> which, again, was addressed to His disciples and to them alone; in the charge given to the Twelve;<sup>4</sup> in the parable of the Lost Sheep in St. Matthew's

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iii. 14 f.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. vi. 4; vi. 6; vi. 8; vi. 14 f.; v. 16; v. 44 f.; v. 48; vi. 1; Luke vi. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. x. 29.

gospel, where it is addressed to His disciples ;<sup>1</sup> and in a later Matthean passage, where He is speaking to those who acknowledged as their Master none but the Christ.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to pause here to take our bearings and see at what point we have arrived. It will be remembered that we began by inquiring what it was that Jesus actually did during His public ministry. It at once appeared that He proclaimed a piece of news. He declared that the Kingdom of God was in being and invited men to enter it. That Kingdom, so He proclaimed by His every word and deed, was already visibly established in His own Person, and the way to enter it was to accept Him in faith as One in whom God was uniquely active for the deliverance of men. But it was God's Kingdom—the Kingdom of Heaven—and those who entered it took rank as the children of God Himself and were constituted a Divine Family whose members were enabled, and therefore required, to become perfect as their Father in Heaven. They were a little flock—to use His own characteristically tender words—but they were to have no fear, for though they could not expect to become perfect in a moment, it was their Father's good pleasure to give them the Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Already, indeed, that Kingdom was theirs, but it had yet to come in power. Meanwhile they were to rest assured that the least of its members was greater even than the greatest of those born of women.<sup>4</sup>

It seems, then, that we have not moved an inch beyond the evidence of the Synoptic Gospels in asserting that what Jesus was doing from the very beginning of His ministry was to constitute a new humanity, to create a

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xviii. 14.    <sup>2</sup> Matt. xxiii. 9 f.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xii. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xi. 11 ; Luke vii. 28.

society or family of men and women who were through Him united to the Father in Heaven and to one another. They constituted a household of which He was Himself the Head, and they would, therefore, naturally share His fortunes. "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of His Household." <sup>1</sup>

There is a further point that calls for notice. The members of this Family of God, of which Jesus was Himself the Lord, received from Him not only the status of children of the Father in Heaven and the right and duty of sharing the fortunes of Him who was the Son. They could also receive from Him, during the days of the public ministry itself, authority to perform those same works of power to which Jesus had Himself appealed as evidence that in His Person the Kingdom of God was established upon earth. Not only the Twelve but the Seventy also received a commission to cast out evil spirits "in His name." <sup>2</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most astonishing of all, remains the fact that already, during this same period of the public ministry, both the apostles and the Seventy were so empowered with the authority of God that their presence and action carried with it the presence and action of their Lord and Master. "He that receiveth you, receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me." <sup>3</sup>

We have found the answer to our question. Jesus came not only to reveal, but to empower; not only to teach disciples, but to create a divine fellowship; not only to announce a Kingdom yet to come, but to *constitute*

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 25.    <sup>2</sup> Luke x. 17.    <sup>3</sup> Luke x. 16; Matt. x. 40.

that Kingdom, as being Himself the Beloved Son of the Heavenly King. Once more a Johannine comment seems to be thoroughly in point. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not, but as many as received Him to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them who believed on His name."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John i. 11 f.



## THE UNIQUE ACT

### CHAPTER VI

#### JESUS INTEGRAL TO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

ALL candid study of the Gospels confirms the verdict of tradition. The Jesus of its pages is a mysterious Person and His Kingdom is a mysterious reality. On the other hand, the evangelical Jesus is an impressively substantial Person and His Kingdom a reality of fact. Whatever opinion may be held about His walking on the water, Jesus walked with a firm tread upon the earth; and it was precisely those men who trod beside Him the prosaic roads of Galilee or of Judea, shared His meals, and slept in His company, who were increasingly convinced that there was infinitely more in Him than met the eye. Nevertheless He did meet the eye. Similarly, the Kingdom itself, which was to Jesus a concrete, manifest phenomenon, something visible and tangible, something that anyone who would might enter then and there, was also, as from the beginning to the end He steadfastly asserted, a thing of mystery and marvel. His public ministry begins with a proclamation of the mystery of the Kingdom of God,<sup>1</sup> and closes with a declaration that His Kingdom is not of this world.<sup>2</sup>

Now, if even to the Jews the Kingdom of God was a mystery, it does not seem possible to expect to obtain any final light on the meaning of that Kingdom from the

<sup>1</sup> Mark iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> John xviii. 36.

analysis of current titles such as Messiah, Son of David, Son of Man. All these are significant, but they are no more than pointers, and it may sometimes be the case, as indeed it appears to have been with the Jews themselves, that such pointers, misapprehended, may point in the wrong direction. To understand the meaning of the Kingdom, which is clearly a family, the most illuminating indications will be those which are afforded by the family life itself and by the words of that family's immediate Head.

Of course, in all family life the most important things are taken for granted. The members of a family are much too vividly conscious of each other to be satisfied with the thin generalisations that a stranger might be tempted to make, and the more self-contained and exclusive the family the truer will this be. There will be family jokes, family phrases, family names full of meaning to members of the family, but to a stranger practically unintelligible. For a whole family life and history have gone to their making.

Now when we remember that the Jews were an exceptionally self-contained and exclusive family, it will not seem surprising that for them life was vivid rather than lucid. Their very thoughts were pictured. Any titles, therefore, that Jesus used were illuminating or suggestive to the Jews only because they were already part and parcel of their community life.

What that life of the Jewish community was like we are able, for two reasons, to appreciate. As students, we possess a record of that life as it was lived during a period of about a thousand years, a record, moreover, bequeathed to us by those who shared most intensely in that life and contributed to its creation. As Christians, also, our

standpoint, our attitude—our life, in short—is of precisely the same factual and vivid character. To us, as to the Jews, God is no mere hypothesis, no mere conclusion to an argument, but the first and last fact in our lives. He exists in His own right, the ground, indeed, of the universe, yet incommensurate with all conceivable existence, and never so near and dear as when He makes His presence felt in personal majesty beyond our numbed conceiving, yet commanding the utter homage of our hearts.

God, then, to the Jews as to the Christians was the Living One, a Person, active, concrete, overflowing alive, a Person with a will and purpose of His own. Of this Person, infinitely beyond their comprehension as He was, they yet had knowledge—a knowledge denied to other peoples. He had revealed Himself within their race, through members of that race commissioned to that end. They knew, moreover, what His purpose was. The Lord had chosen Israel for His own possession. He Himself was the true King of Israel, who had made with them a covenant and given them a law. Through Israel, through admission into that visible and tangible Kingdom of the saints of the Most High, all peoples should be brought into fellowship with the Creator, the Heavenly King, until the earth was filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters covered the sea.

That life, however, was a life of give and take ; and the Jews, it seemed, were not prepared to give. They had received so much and they gave little in return. The kingdom of Israel never became the Kingdom of God. The actual phrase, “ Kingdom of God,” appears only with the Gospels—in company with the reality which the

phrase covers. God's sovereignty had not been established within Israel itself—let alone in the world or in the universe at large. God was honoured in Israel, but He was not obeyed.

Only too vividly did the prophets, with bitterness in their hearts, realise this fact. Nevertheless they did not despair. Israel had failed God, but God would not fail His people. He would make with Israel a new covenant and give them a law that should be graven on the tablets of the heart. The day would come when all the members of Israel from the least to the greatest—and not the prophets only—should know the Lord, for God Himself would intervene to redeem Israel. Born of the seed of David, yet clothed with divine attributes, would arise One who should reign over Israel in the name and with the power of God. He would deliver Israel from its sinful state and from the oppression of its foes ; He would establish both righteousness and peace. He was the Messiah, the Lord's anointed *in excelsis*, the Christ, the King of Israel.

Now even a weak imagination will readily perceive that the Messiah, should He ever come, could not possibly announce Himself as such to Israel, could not conceivably submit credentials for their criticism and acceptance. He could but challenge their allegiance and manifest Himself in acts of power and mercy. Israel, not He, would be upon its trial should He come.

But though this is dazzlingly clear it does not, of course, in the least follow that the past history and life of Israel would go for nothing when that great crisis came. The Jew had much advantage every way. Alone among the peoples of the earth the Jews had a true knowledge of the

only God. The Messiah Himself was to be born of Jewish stock. He would speak in terms that only Jews could understand. Above all, it was the Hope of Israel that He would come to realise. And in fact when He did actually come the first to recognise Him on the earth were those who still cherished that Hope with pious faith and were "looking for the redemption of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

Now Jesus certainly was the Messiah. He received His vocation to Messiahship at baptism. His Messianic powers provided the matter of His temptations in the wilderness. He Himself treated as the crisis of His ministry Simon Peter's confession of His Messianic name. And it was as Messiah, King of Israel, that He suffered crucifixion. He was certainly Messiah. But He was the Messiah in disguise, or—to use the language of a later day—the Christ in His days of voluntary humiliation. For this Messiah, as prophecy itself had half anticipated, though born in a wonderful way of David's seed, had another and heavenly origin. He was David's Son—but He was also David's Lord.<sup>2</sup>

If the matter be weighed with any care it will become clear that, even had Jesus so desired, there was no external sign by which He could attest the fact of His Messiahship in such a way as to put that fact beyond the possibility of doubt. For there was no recognised sign by which the Messiah, should He come, could be identified. He would be His own sign to the world. By what He was and what He did, by His evident character and by His redemptive power, by these alone could He be recognised.

I, for one, do not presume to probe the self-consciousness of Jesus. I accept with grateful heart the awful

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xx. 41-44.

narrative of His temptation in the wilderness,<sup>1</sup> a narrative which obviously can have no source but one. Already, for reasons which I have tried to give in the first chapter of this book, I am intellectually and morally convinced that He was peerless and without flaw, of a moral purity and warmth without stain or chill, of a holiness undimmed and burning. But here from His own lips I learn that He was tempted, and truly shared the full conditions of our human life. More, far more than that. I catch in this tremendous scene a glimpse of the terrific tension that constituted the unbaffled serenity which is the wonder of His public life. I am reminded how, after the next theophany to that which accompanied His baptism, another hint of this same tension escaped His lips, and how, as He descended from the Mountain of Transfiguration and encountered His ineffectual disciples below, there was wrung from Him that very bitter cry: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I endure you?"<sup>2</sup> And so my thoughts are borne on irresistibly to the mysteries—dark with excess of bright—of the Agony, the Passion, and the Cry of Dereliction on the Cross, and I ask myself this question, with strangely blended feelings of compassion and revolt: How is it possible for people, with these slender volumes of the Gospel there to read, so to fail to inwardly digest them? Have they not marked the serene perfection of the details and the manifest coherence of the whole?

The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness did not turn upon the question of whether He was or was not Messiah. This searching test was not intellectual but moral. Of His Messianic status and powers Jesus had no doubt

<sup>1</sup> Matt. iv. 1-11; Luke iv. 1-13.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ix. 19.



whatever. Indeed, it was precisely the possession of those supernatural powers that furnished the occasion for the tempting. Being Messiah, how should He act? That was the precise question. Without rashly intruding, we may surely see in each temptation a setting of love against love. Jesus desired intensely to feed and heal men's bodies. But when it came—as it must and did come—to choosing, His choice was not in doubt. "Man shall not live by bread alone." One door to popularity He thus barred behind Him without flinching. Again, Jesus desired intensely to meet weak yet courageous faith with the blissful marvel of concrete satisfaction. None the less, miracle must wait on faith. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." So was a second door to popularity closed for love of men, who were worthy of more than bread or portents. Finally, Jesus desired the free allegiance of mankind. He could have had it, for His appeal was irresistible save when it ran counter to human pride and passion. That free allegiance, so intensely sought, was His for the having, if He would only have been content to take men as they were. Yet allegiance on such terms He rejected—with what pangs no tongue can utter. For He loved men far better than they loved themselves. He saw them as creatures whose worship must be heart-whole and undivided. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve." So was the final bolt shot home and the door to earthly favour barred for ever. For His divine claim He died.

As Seeley discerned and proclaimed in *Ecce Homo*, the problem that confronted Jesus in the wilderness was never an intellectual problem, it was a moral problem. Of His

Messianic status He had no doubt whatever. It was, indeed, precisely the possession of those supernatural powers which was the raw material of the Temptation. The question was not, *Can I do this?* but, *Ought I to do this?* not, *Do I possess Messianic powers?* but, *How shall I employ them?* Without rashly intruding where angels might fear to tread we may yet plainly recognise already in the Jesus of the Temptation, Him who for our sakes became a crucified Messiah, who saved others but would not save Himself, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. The narrative of the Temptation confirms immensely our interpretation of the proclamation of Jesus. There, at all events, the Messiah is seen clearly as no mere messenger but as Himself integral to the Kingdom of God which He proclaimed.

On Jesus, then, must our anxious and expectant gaze be fixed, if we would begin to understand at all the meaning of the Kingdom of God. About Jesus and the Kingdom there is an air of mystery and marvel. The Kingdom itself, visibly established upon earth, taking shape under the open sky in terms of concrete flesh and blood, is yet a divine Kingdom—the Kingdom of Him who is in heaven. In precisely the same fashion this mysterious Jesus of the Gospels, with His incredibly calm personal assumptions, His seemingly fantastic claims and offers, His effect of supernatural dread upon those who daily shared with Him the common life of men, comes home to us to-day, simply in the Gospel portrait as it stands, as someone disarming and appealing, someone authentically human, just because He is so utterly unique—He whose every word at once inebriates and sobers the attentive soul.

We ought to be abashed by the spectacle of Jesus, but normally those only are abashed who have begun to know Him. His first effect is to attract. He attracts us as normal, ordinary human beings. It is enough to approach the Gospels with an honest and good heart for them to make their own impression. The appeal of Jesus and His words is not restricted to men of learning, nor again to men who are conspicuously good or who have reached already a certain height of spiritual attainment. As of old, He comes to seek and rescue the bewildered and those who are astray. As of old, He has compassion on the multitude because He sees them as sheep without a shepherd. Now, as then, the multitudes would hear Him gladly if only they could listen to His words in the expectation of hearing something new and fresh. But expectancy waits upon candour of mind and frankness of outlook.

Now those who are frank will surely recognise that, if the Gospels are to be approached with an honest and good heart, they must be approached as something more than ordinary books. They must be approached as something more than ordinary books because they *are* something more than ordinary books. It is not only that these words have moulded the life of Christendom and changed the course of history and helped to make that whole environment into which you and I were born. Nor is it that they enshrine the spiritual life of centuries. Their real claim is not that they enshrine such life; it is that they created and inspired it, and they did so, and continue to do so, because, from the first moment they were uttered, these words were—and were recognised as being—authoritative words. They were spoken by One who

claimed to be the Lord and Master of those to whom He spoke. Moreover, they were recorded, and they have been treasured, because those who recorded and those who treasured them believed them to be "words of eternal life,"<sup>1</sup> uttered for all time by One whom they constantly affirmed not only to be alive for evermore, but to be active in their midst.

Therefore, if men think it really worth their while to approach the Gospels at all they will approach them with expectancy and a certain flutter of the heart. They will come in the hope that from their reading they may take away rather more than they brought to it. They will draw near in the spirit of disciples. To the less sophisticated so much will appear only common sense. Is it too much to hope that to the more sophisticated it may seem to be æsthetic common sense?

One thing, at least, is certain. Those on whose horizon has begun to glimmer even from afar the divine Kingdom will find here a reality congruous with their dreams. Already the Jesus of the Gospels has begun "to touch them where they live." In that moment they are at once exalted and abashed. A sober, alert reading of the Sermon on the Mount can only heighten that effect.

Yet it will help greatly to remember what that Sermon is, and to whom spoken. It is the most exhilarating sketch of a way of life that anywhere exists. But it is something much more than an ideal; it is a description of the life of the Kingdom of God. And the Kingdom of God exists not only in heaven, but on earth. Already even on this side heaven that divine kingdom manifests itself in concrete reality, as a family of men and women, boys and

<sup>1</sup> John vi. 68.

girls, brought into fellowship with God Himself, whom they claim steadfastly as their true Father through Jesus—the Lord by whose life they live. All this is more than the experience, the discovery, or the doctrine of the post-Pentecostal Church. Such an interpretation of the Kingdom of God is authorised already by the Synoptic record of the life and words of Jesus while He was visibly present and active here on earth. For in that record it is plainly stated, for all to read who will, that to His own disciples—and to them alone—Jesus spoke not only of “*My Father*,” but of “*Your Father*” and “*Thy Father*” as well.

What is the significance of this pregnant fact? Already even at that early stage the answer to such a question is unambiguously given. We have noticed that the kingdom of Israel never became the Kingdom of God, wherein the Father’s name was hallowed and His will done on earth as it is done in heaven. Nevertheless even under the ancient dispensation it was possible to speak of God—as the Lord and the Redeemer of His people—as, in some sense, the Father of Israel as a whole. “Out of Egypt did I call My Son.”<sup>1</sup> In such words God Himself is represented as speaking through Hosea, appealing to the memory of Israel’s deliverance from bondage to the Pharaohs. But it was with a meaning much more profound than this that Jesus spoke of the Fatherhood of God, for He consistently reserved such language for His own disciples’ hearing.

Nor did He conceal the reason of His practice. He declared that with the mission of John the Baptist the Israel of past history had culminated and ceased. “The

<sup>1</sup> Hosea xi. 1.



Law and the Prophets were until John : from that time forward the Kingdom of God is proclaimed, and every man enters violently into it.”<sup>1</sup> It would seem that in the person of Jesus had appeared that prophet “greater than Moses,” whose coming had been predicted in the Law itself.<sup>2</sup> For the Jewish mind the greatness of Moses consisted in the fact that God Himself had “prepared him from the foundation of the world to be the mediator of His covenant.”<sup>3</sup> According to the words of St. Peter, spoken at the Gate Beautiful, to refuse allegiance to the new Prophet entailed—precisely as disloyalty to the old covenant had entailed—exclusion from the *qahal*, the congregation, or the church, of Israel. The *qahal* ! It is the very word that Jesus used when He so royally acclaimed Simon Peter’s confession of His Messianic name. “On this—the rock of thy confession of My name—I Myself will build My *qahal*, My Israel.”<sup>4</sup>

There cannot be two Israels. The new Israel of God is the congregation of God’s Messiah, or, in the language of our era, the Church of Christ. Nor is it hard to understand why against that Church the gates of death shall not prevail. The kingdom of Israel, as we have seen, never became the Kingdom of God ; for there God was not obeyed, His name not hallowed, nor His will performed, as in heaven so on earth. With the new Israel it is otherwise. True, its members—here on earth at least—are not yet made perfect ; true, they may make shipwreck of the faith and so be cast away. Yet already in that Kingdom the will of God is perfectly accomplished, and its members—if but faithful to their membership—are in the road to

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 12-14.      <sup>2</sup> Deut. xviii. 18 f. ; Acts iii. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Assumption of Moses, i. 14.      <sup>4</sup> Matt. xvi. 18.



divine sonship. For the very being and progress of that Kingdom are rooted fast in Him who came as Man to do the Father's will, to restore in Man God's image, and to make us partakers of His nature, who, being from everlasting God, stooped in purposeful compassion to take our human nature on Himself. In Jesus, heaven and earth are one.

There is, then, an inexpressibly important sense in which the Kingdom of Heaven is yet at the same time an earthly Kingdom. Consider, for example, the Beatitudes of Jesus. Ponder them, if only for a moment, with a firm resolve to bear in mind that their reference is supernatural, and not pedestrianly moral. So read, they cannot fail to be for you, as a normal human being, of an all but irresistible appeal. For these Beatitudes are at once bracing and alluring; they share the quality of early morning in the spring of the year; they are what a poet might call "shivering-sweet." And this appeal of theirs comes home to us as men, in sheer virtue of our humanity.

The whole of the Sermon on the Mount is something more than moral; it is supernatural, and for that reason human to the core, cohering with the mystery of our common life as men, and at once catholic and practical in its appeal, after a manner which the most airy dialogues of Plato can never hope to match.

Yet it is only as they are so read, in the living context of the life of the family of God, that the Beatitudes become practical at all. If you insist on considering them from the point of view of hand-to-mouth existence, you will justly protest that the poor, the hungry, the sad, and the ill-used are not blessed, but pitiable, and, in that sense, you can claim the authority of Jesus for your protest. For

if Jesus became poor it was for our enriching ; if He was hungry it was that He might feed His sheep ; if He was sad He was yet the bringer of great joy ; and if ill-treated, by His stripes He healed the wounds of others.

Let us cease to be maudlin and try to be direct. It is the poor *in spirit* who are blessed.<sup>1</sup> See how this word of Jesus wakes at once an echo in our hearts. We who did not make ourselves, we for whom our life, with all its chances, and this breathing, incalculable world, are one vast gift—how should we not be poor in spirit if we would be men at all ? Even to those who do not venture to look so far afield, who take things as they come, who are, as they would say, just normal human beings, this supernatural Beatitude appeals. For is it not already their experience that those who are poor in spirit, those who travel light, those who are spontaneously grateful and easily made glad, that such people—who, after all, exist—are of all men most enviable ?

Human life at its best contains already a prophecy of which the new life of God's Kingdom is the marvellous fulfilment and completion. It will appear that every Beatitude of Jesus—rightly understood—has witness borne to it by the life which, as normal human beings, we already know and value. None the less, these human values to which the Beatitudes make an immediate appeal are not—and well we know it—sufficient to themselves. But those who read these same Beatitudes with a fresh sense of the authority behind them, and of their more-than-earthly reference, will find their broken human prophecies completed, and their drifting wistful aspirations

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 3 ; Luke vi. 20.

transfigured into substantial and assured realities. So—but only so—can the Beatitudes be rightly understood.

It is surely something more than an accident that to the last, as also to the first, Beatitude there is attached a present, not a future blessing. “Blessed are the poor in spirit; Blessed are the persecuted; for theirs *is* the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>1</sup> The fact seems to indicate that this description of the life of the Kingdom of God appeals to us as normal human beings because it has witness borne to it by what is already our actual experience of life. Of the first Beatitude, as we have seen, this is conspicuously true. It is true also of the last.

Human life, at its recognised best, attests the reality of what is beyond nature; and, in the face of all the arguments of common sense, the ordinary man consents not only to revere but in a sense to envy those who—with joy and ungrudgingly—risk life and limb in the free service of a cause which they feel to be greater than they know. You will forgive anyone who has been a soldier for denying that the Beatitudes of Jesus are unpractical and remote from life. Precisely because they are supernatural in their reference they are human to the core. They picture the life of the Divine Kingdom; and that Kingdom, as we come to know it, is nothing more or less than humanity reconstituted and restored in Christ.

We have asked ourselves a question. “What is it that Christ came to do; what is it that He did? He came to impart, He *did* impart a new quality of life. To that quality He gave the name of love;<sup>2</sup> and we have been painfully revising our facile ideas of what is meant by love ever since. The love of God for us and the love He

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 3; Matt. v. 10.

<sup>2</sup> John xiii. 35.

kindles in the hearts of those who respond in faith to His advances—this is a new thing in man's life. It can be traced already in Christ's picture of the Kingdom. All love includes expectancy. All love includes familiarity. That explains the dual nature of the parables of the Kingdom with their explicit contrast between now and then, with their promise of something incalculable yet to come.

Nevertheless that Kingdom has taken root on earth, and earth is transfigured. For, though diverse, it is not alien from earth. The other world is the deeper truth of this world. In the Son, the Father is at once revealed and active. He who could take our Nature and incorporate it with His own for ever is Himself Personally One with God. It is in the light of this faith that human life is seen for the first time for what it really is. It is this which explains the new righteousness which exceeds the old—in kind even more than in degree.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, this life, this righteousness, is imparted, not acquired. The Kingdom is essentially a gift—a gift to be received by anyone who will, but to be received by all on the same footing. It is, of course, a spiritual Kingdom, to be received in faith. But faith is faith in Someone. And Christian faith is more than faith in God ; it is faith in God revealed, and not only revealed but active, in Jesus Christ, His Son. For Him, the Eternal and the Uncreate, had been prepared a body<sup>2</sup>—a body truly human such as ours. In that body He was born into the world, and, in the moment of that birth, the Kingdom of God was in the midst of men. It is in complete and utter harmony with this, the central Fact of Christian life ; it is in complete and utter harmony with

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. x. 5.

the saving wonder of the Word made Flesh,<sup>1</sup> that when Jesus took His bodily departure from the world He left behind Him, as has been truly said, not a book but "a close body of imperfect men." In the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Creation restored in Christ, the Spiritual and the Bodily—whether in heaven or on earth—are not opposed, but complementary.

When, therefore, the inevitable question arises in the minds of those who ponder the Beatitudes ; when men ask uneasily whether this Kingdom is not after all a dream, the answer springs in the same moment to their minds and hearts. That Life is no dream ; for it was actually lived, wrought out in flesh and blood upon this earth ; that Life endures in Heaven. Not only so: that Life, once perfectly lived, is being actually—though not perfectly—lived on earth to-day. What has become of that Kingdom of God which, in the persons of the apostles, truly came nigh to men, whether they received it or whether they did not ? Whither has it vanished ?

It did not vanish. The sole title of anyone to write a book like this is that he has been granted the abasing honour of membership in that Kingdom. The mere existence of that Kingdom is a standing challenge to all—whether those without its bounds or those within. And it is open to all who will enter it in faith.

"But," men say, "what is the token of its presence ?" The ancient answer stands : "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation." It may not correspond with your ideas ; nor even with your not unwarrantable demands. None the less, "the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you." That Kingdom must be entered, if

<sup>1</sup> John i. 14.



at all, in faith. It can begin to be comprehended only from within. Yet that Kingdom has persisted, and persists.

"But it is insignificant." That is true. It is like a grain of mustard seed, or like leaven obscurely working in the dough.

"But is it worth considering? Does it justify an adjustment of my outlook, and perhaps a radical rearrangement of my life?" Those who are honest members of that Kingdom will assure you that it is a pearl for which they could not take in exchange any prizes the world has to offer. They will tell you that they know that in this field there is a treasure for which they are well content to dig.

"But in this vaunted Kingdom honest material goods are spurned?" On the contrary, its members are pledged to works of mercy, while, for their own case, if they seek the true riches of that Kingdom they have the highest conceivable authority that such things as are needed will be added.<sup>1</sup>

"But its members are intolerant of others." It is true. But this intolerance is but the intolerance of charity and truth. All other roads lead only to destruction and bring men to that most bitter point where desire itself shall fail. The members of that Kingdom of Heaven wish that other men were even as themselves;<sup>2</sup> for they have found life—life that does not go bad.

"Exactly," comes the unsympathetic rejoinder, "it is a society of prigs who pride themselves on being better than their neighbours and claim to be secure of heaven." It is nothing of the kind. This Kingdom is rather like a net

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xxvi. 29.



cast into the sea and gathering fish of every kind, both good and bad.<sup>1</sup> When that Kingdom suffers its final change and is brought to its catastrophic climax the bad fish will be cast away.

It will be seen, I think, that the Beatitudes of Jesus and His parables of the Kingdom cohere with the Gospel as a whole, and with the witness of the still enduring Church. It is true that the Church contains members who are members only in name. For this reason it cannot be identified *sans phrase* with the Kingdom of God. None the less, the life of the Church is organic to the life of Jesus. In that sphere, and in that sphere alone, He shares His life to the full with those who yield Him the faith that He demands. And it is an integral part of faith in Christ to be ready and eager to accept that life where and as it is offered for our acceptance.

On the other hand, the Church is not the direct object of our faith. We believe that there is one Church, Catholic, Holy, Apostolic. But that really means that we believe in the incarnate Lord as One still active among men for their salvation, active in the Church, whose are the Gospels and the sacraments of Divine grace—the Church which is one with Him and is thus rightly named His Body,<sup>2</sup> the instrument alike of His presence and His action among men.

It is conceded that the Church is no society of perfect men. On earth it never will be. But the Church is infinitely greater than its members, for it is the home and channel of a Divine yet Human Life. If you reply that you will not seek a Divine Life within a company admittedly imperfect, you are bound to inquire how you—yourself

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 47-50.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. i. 23.

imperfect—expect to enter into fellowship with Christ. It is no answer to protest that you honour Christ more than any churchman you have met. It is difficult to see how you can be sure that what you say is true. But after all, the chief question is not whether you honour Christ, but whether He can honour *you*. And since you value honesty sincerely you will see at once that for Christ to honour you must involve on His part a truly mighty work. And you may make it impossible for Him to act. History may repeat itself. It may be said of you as it was said of certain cities long ago: “He could do there no mighty work because of unbelief.”<sup>1</sup>

To believe in Christ is something more than to approve of Him. To accept Christ at all means to accept Him not on your terms but on His. And there is really no doubt about the nature of those terms. The historic Gospels and the historic Church are the sole sources of any knowledge of Christ, as Christ, that you possess. And their witness is unmistakable, and utterly at one. Christ is to be found and known—if found and known at all—within a visible community, continuous through history, and still extant. That community has borne, and still bears, witness to Him.

Once receive that witness, and there is only one course open. It is to enter that community, and to enter it, not on the bare chance that you may find something there, but to enter it in faith, believing that Christ Himself is active there, offering Himself to all who will faithfully accept Him, and empowering men to become sons of God. Already, in the days before His passion, Christ had begun to build His Israel, the Church against which the gates

<sup>1</sup> Mark vi. 5.

of death should not prevail. "Believe the good news that the Kingdom of God is present."<sup>1</sup> "The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you."<sup>2</sup> "He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and He that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me."<sup>3</sup> "And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you ; and heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The Kingdom of God has come to you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go out into its streets and say, Even the dust from your city which clings to our feet we wipe off against you : nevertheless, of this be sure, that the Kingdom of God has come near to you."

It is the great difficulty, confronting all historians, that the past and the present are continuous. It is also the sole incentive for the writing of history at all. The past can be read only in the light of the present. At the same time it is the past and not the present that the historian sets out to read. He must interpret his documents sympathetically, but it must be the documents that he interprets. Unless those documents are patient of the interpretation which he puts upon them the historian is not writing history but fiction.

It is, therefore, in the light of the present that we have been trying to interpret certain ancient documents of the Christian Church. These documents—the first three Gospels—taken as they stand, have been found to yield a portrait of a Person. But the more we gazed upon this portrait the less possible did it become to regard it as a portrait and nothing more. Unlike any other portrait

<sup>1</sup> Mark i. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xvii. 21 ; x. 9 and 11.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. x. 40 ; Luke x. 16.

it compelled us to admit that it was no work of human imagination but a transcript from the life. And then the strange thing began to happen. The portrait faded, and, in its stead, the subject Himself gathered substance before our wondering eyes, moved out as it were from the picture into life, and challenged our attention by actions charged, as it seemed, with a significance beyond themselves. The Portrait ceased to be a portrait and became a Drama.

Even so—for we were following the Marcan story—it was apparently a drama in mid-course. The first act was already over. At some point in the past the “ Kingdom of God ” had been established upon earth, and when Jesus appeared in Galilee it was to announce the fact of its arrival. The Kingdom of God, as the Gospel record vividly attests, is nothing less than the human family reconstituted and “ made whole ” by God Himself, acting not from without but from within the ranks of men. Some thirty years before Jesus came publicly proclaiming the Good News, that Kingdom had been visibly established among men. For the Kingdom is not theory but fact, not a Message but an Act of God, and it originated not with a Prophecy, but with an Arrival. It dates from the first Christmas Day. The Kingdom is a Person.

What we have in the record of the Public Ministry of Jesus is the account of how already before His Passion He shared His Divine yet Human Life with men, and so bound them together in one Family in Him. Within that Family the Kingdom of God was truly present from the start, but it had yet to come in power. That is the real force of the parable of the grain of mustard seed. Something already visible and active among men was to take an unimaginable turn. Superficially, there was no more

congruity between the present and the future Kingdom than between the grain of seed and the great tree. In the eyes of God they are continuously one. In the eyes of man there is a catastrophic incalculable change from that which is to that which is to be. Granted the principle of life within, God—in ways beyond all human thought—will work a marvel from without. The change will be His work, not Man's. To that law the Messiah Himself freely and actively submits. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John xii. 24.

## THE UNIQUE ACT

### CHAPTER VII

#### THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN COME IN POWER

AT the point we have now reached, the Gospel, without ceasing to be a Portrait, has widened out into a Drama. There is clearly a great Action going on. When that spectacle opened before our eyes, the first scene was already over. At some time in the past the Kingdom of God had been established among men. Jesus appeared going out into the public world, drawing the attention of all men to Himself, and proclaiming the visible presence of a Kingdom which had achieved embodiment at Bethlehem. Those who accepted Him in faith were admitted to that Kingdom, which was integral with Himself and living with His life.

But the climax of the Drama is still in the future. The Kingdom is present as an achieved reality, but it has yet to come "in power." The Kingdom, though present, has a forward look.

Yet this Drama is a real drama. Although the main Action is to come, it is, when it comes, no fortuitous occurrence, but one which has dominated the whole movement from its first beginning. He with whose birth the Divine Kingdom was established upon earth will, in His own Person, establish that Kingdom above Time for ever. That is His end. And from start to finish He has no doubt about the means. He will establish



the Kingdom in power,<sup>1</sup> and He will do so by His Death.

The death of Jesus was no afterthought. It is impossible to ponder the Gospel record as a whole and to consider it directly as in itself it is, without seizing this point with a vividness that puts all hesitation out of court. Like every other deep impression made by this tremendous narrative upon the minds and hearts of men it does not commend itself at once. But as the drama takes shape before attentive eyes there comes a moment when its true meaning flashes so luminously on the mind that we are astonished by our former blindness. For example, when the point is reached at which Jesus sets His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem and strides along the road, while His disciples follow in a huddled throng behind, there is no doubt at all about His purpose.<sup>2</sup> He is going to Jerusalem to die; and the moment that that terrific fact looms before the startled consciousness it is as though a key were turned and a door opened, through which a flood of light pours swift and bright, illuminating the whole drama to such purpose that it becomes alive with meaning from its beginning to its end.

Already, when He came from Nazareth to be baptized of John, the face of Jesus was set towards the goal of Calvary. It is this which lends its force to the Temptation in the Wilderness, this which gives its full meaning to the Voice that came from Heaven at His Baptism. "Thou art My only, My beloved Son." Yes, but not only so. "In Thee I delight."<sup>3</sup> These words refer directly to Isaiah's great prophecy of the Suffering Servant of the Lord: "Behold My servant whom I uphold: My chosen, in

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 1.    <sup>2</sup> Luke ix. 51; Mark x. 32.    <sup>3</sup> Mark i. 11.

whom My soul delighteth. . . .<sup>1</sup> My servant shall prosper, He shall be exalted and be lifted up, and shall be very high . . . because He poured out His soul unto death.”<sup>2</sup> To this prophecy Jesus constantly referred. “The Son of Man is come not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom *for many*.”<sup>3</sup> Just so was it said of the Servant of the Lord that He should “bear the sin of *many*.”<sup>4</sup> Again, “the Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him,”<sup>5</sup> and, with a reference yet more distinct, on the eve of His betrayal He exclaims to the Eleven: “For I say unto you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, And He was reckoned with the transgressors: for that which concerneth Me hath fulfilment.”<sup>6</sup>

Yes, the death of Jesus was no afterthought. Already in the moment of His baptism, if not before, His course lay clear before Him. He was the Servant of the Lord, who, for the transgression of God’s People, should be stricken.<sup>7</sup> None the less, it was as no stray individual, as no prophet even merely, that He would suffer and, by suffering, redeem. This Servant was none other than the King Messiah, the Father’s only Son; and just as He was born into the world at all, only through the free response of human faith to a divine call and challenge;<sup>8</sup> just as He could admit to His Kingdom, already present upon earth, only those who repented and believed, so could that Kingdom when established above Time for ever belong only to those who bore Him true allegiance, as One who was indeed Messiah—most truly Human yet certainly Divine.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xlii. 1.<sup>2</sup> Isa. lii. 13; liii. 12.<sup>3</sup> Mark x. 45.<sup>4</sup> Isa. liii. 12. <sup>5</sup> Mark xiv. 21. <sup>6</sup> Luke xxii. 37; Isa. liii. 4 f.<sup>7</sup> Isa. liii. 4 f.<sup>8</sup> Luke i. 38.

Here, of course, we have the explanation of the fact that the predictions of the Passion date from Peter's explicit confession of His Messianic name. It is upon that rock—and on that rock alone—the rock of human faith, freely given, that Jesus Himself can build that Kingdom that shall know no end. Already in the Synoptic record hints had been given of the tremendous act by which the Divine Kingdom should be established in power. One day the Bridegroom would be taken from them. So Jesus had declared in the first days of His public ministry.<sup>1</sup> But such words had then no meaning save in His mind Who spoke them. After the confession at Cæsarea Philippi it was not easy, but it was possible, as it had not been possible before, to speak plainly of His passion. "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed, and after three days rise again."<sup>2</sup> Even then they did not understand.<sup>3</sup> How could they? A crucified Messiah! No one had ever heard of such a thing. They were not meant to understand. Jesus made no attempt to explain this dark saying, and, for themselves, they were afraid to ask Him. Events would teach them what no words could do. For the essential condition of docility had been secured. They had learnt not to pit their judgment against His. They trusted that it was He who should redeem Israel. Only to those who had, could more be given. But to them it would be given beyond all they asked or thought.

Once the conviction gains upon the mind that the central purpose of Jesus was to die, the drama of the Gospel

<sup>1</sup> Mark ii. 19 f; *see also* Mark ix. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Mark viii. 31 f.

<sup>3</sup> Mark ix. 31 f.

appears in a new light. It is seen to be one vast work of preparation for something incalculable yet to come. As the climax approaches Jesus appears as gathering Himself for some great act of liberation. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I afflicted until it be accomplished."<sup>1</sup> Through that baptism of death the Kingdom of God is to enter on its life of power. When the sons of Zebedee begged of Jesus the chief places in His coming kingdom He met their request with a question: "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"<sup>2</sup> Baptism and cup alike figure His death, from which a new, full life will spring. His death is the prelude, and the means, to "the Kingdom of God arrived in power."<sup>3</sup> After His passion Jesus Himself was to demand of two disciples whether the prophetic writings did not make it clear that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to enter so into His glory.<sup>4</sup> But the prophetic writings did not make it clear, until Jesus interpreted them, not in words only but in deeds. Only one person in Jewish history till then had ever construed Isaiah's prophecy in Messianic terms. He who did so was Himself Messiah, whose outlook and action was at one with the outlook and action, not of men, but God.

Not only, then, was the death of Jesus no afterthought. Not only was it predetermined from the start. It was predetermined by Himself. The more the Gospel narrative is pondered the more does this conviction impose itself.

There is need to ponder. For until that conviction in

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Mark x. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Mark ix. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xxiv. 25 f.

all its force and fulness arises in the soul, the Cross of Christ will remain an unmeaning tragedy, a mere brute fact. But this conviction is more and other than an intellectual conviction ; it carries with it not a new opinion but an overmastering and formative belief. In that moment the words of St. Bernard come home to us with overwhelming force : “ Not the death, but the will of Him who freely died, was well-pleasing in God’s sight.” The death of Jesus was deliberate and purposeful—an act of forceful love. The Cross of Christ makes a profound appeal ; but the nature of that appeal is often misconceived. The spectacle of Calvary does not demand compassion. The spectacle of Calvary does not demand our feeble admiration. The spectacle of Calvary is an appeal, direct and searching, to the practical allegiance of men’s faith.

The appeal of the Cross as a revelation of God’s love is too often blunted. A curious idea has somehow become prevalent that Jesus died upon the Cross to *demonstrate* the love of God for men. It is forgotten that there is only one way of demonstrating love. Love is shown by acting lovingly. If the Cross is to be a revelation of the love of God at all, it must first be seen by faith as a great and purposeful action. It must be accepted for what it actually was—the very means itself to the establishment of the Kingdom of God in power upon the earth.

Nothing less and nothing more than this is the true Gospel of the Cross of Christ. It simply is not true that the spectacle of Calvary taken by itself moves men to repentance. How can it do so? Men may “ smite their breasts ” indeed.<sup>1</sup> But to small purpose. For they then

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiii. 48.



“ return ” and go about their ordinary life, and the whole point of the Cross of Christ is that it opens to all men a life that is not ordinary. Penitence without faith is a sheer impossibility. And faith is not an aspiration to a high ideal, but the steadfast recognition of a sublime yet sober fact.

With the Resurrection of the Crucified the Kingdom of God was established upon earth *in power*. That is the point of the word that Jesus spoke when He had risen from the dead. “ All authority is given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you : and lo I am with you all the days even unto the consummation of the present order.” <sup>1</sup>

There is, indeed, an other-worldly consummation for which we look—a final translation of created life into heaven itself. But since the entrance of the human Jesus into the glory of His Father, this present world and age, this “ sphere of our sorrow,” where Time and Space divide, this daily life, has become other than it was. God Himself is personally present and active in our human midst. He who has entered, in that Human Nature which He took at Bethlehem and perfected on Calvary, entered into heaven itself, “ this same Jesus ” is with us all the days, even until the consummation of this finite age.

Moreover, this presence and action of the ascended Lord is not in contradiction, but in utter and complete agreement, with that Presence and Action which we have pondered in the records of His earthly life. The Gospel

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 18-20.



ends as it began. The Kingdom of God is in our midst, and it has come with power. As then, so now : as in Galilee and Judea, so to-day in England and throughout Christendom, the Divine Kingdom is a Human Kingdom, a true phenomenon, concrete, visible, accessible on earth. True, " the phenomena," the things now seen, are temporal and only for a time : true, the things not yet seen are eternal and abide for ever.<sup>1</sup> But the invisible realities are presented and conveyed through visible and human means, which God has made His own.

The Body of the Lord is spiritually discerned.<sup>2</sup> It was so in Galilee. It is so still. None the less there is a Body to discern. Men must be born again if they would see the Kingdom of God.<sup>3</sup> But it is the entire man—body and soul—who is thus born anew, and he is born into the Kingdom of Heaven by an action spiritual and bodily at once. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Church, one life.<sup>4</sup>

The Cross is the pivot on which the Gospel turns. It is the decisive action to which that Life led up from its deliberate beginning to its deliberate end, and in that Act the Lord of heaven and earth laid down that human life which He had made His own, laid it down that He might take it again—take it in such wise that He could share it to the full with the Israel of God, which He had built already on the rock of human faith.

So, as we have seen, the Gospel ends as it began. " Repent and believe the good news. The Kingdom of Heaven is come." Not only so ; that Kingdom has come in power. It exists on earth, a real kingdom, with real

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 18.

<sup>3</sup> John iii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 29 ; 2 Cor. ii. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. iv. 4 f.

boundaries, within whose limits is accessible to men a new quality of life not to be found elsewhere. It exists on earth, a real kingdom, a community of men in fellowship with God Himself, and so with one another. But it is a kingdom "whose shining bounds increase," a kingdom no longer shut up against men, but open to all alike on precisely the same terms.

Those terms remain unchanged. "Repent and believe the good news. The Kingdom of God is come." All that is required is that men should repent—turn from their isolated, self-centred, finite, mortal lives to Him who binds them, body and soul, into one family with God Himself. Such repentance or turning cannot be, save as the product and flowering of deliberate and active faith; and the faith required is nothing else than the free response of the whole man, compact of soul and body, to Christ Himself as indeed present and active among men in that visible community which, by His death and exaltation, is rejuvenated and empowered.

The Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep<sup>1</sup>—for that "little flock" to which it was (and is) the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> We are so accustomed to allow the words of the Gospel to fall unheeded and meaningless upon our ears that we do not even notice how strange is the method of deliverance such words propose. If the Shepherd be smitten will not the flock be scattered? Yes, indeed. So Jesus Himself declared and so it came to pass.<sup>3</sup> In that dread hour the foolish, timid flock forsook Him and fled.

But He is no ordinary Shepherd. Risen from the dead,

<sup>1</sup> John x. 11.    <sup>2</sup> Luke xii. 32.    <sup>3</sup> Matt. xxvi. 31; see Mark xiv. 50.

He rallied that poor flock, and the flock was not only rallied but transformed. At Pentecost it suffered a rich change. Without ceasing to be the little flock of the Good Shepherd, it became a fold into which the world was summoned. The sheep had become shepherds! How enduring and actual that transformation was all history is there to show. But its catastrophic and sudden character appears in one short sentence in the Acts of the Apostles. "Peter"—think of it, Peter, who two short months before had denied all knowledge of the Man—"Peter stood up for the eleven and was bold."<sup>1</sup> On the day of Pentecost the Kingdom of Heaven—not only in its Head, but in its members—came in power.

It is not my intention to tell again the story of the Passion. I will only borrow words more eloquent than mine to excuse such timidity, if it be thought to need excuse.

"Every attempt to amplify that story has diminished it. The task has been attempted by many men of real genius and eloquence as well as by only too many vulgar sentimentalists and self-conscious rhetoricians. The tale has been retold with patronising pathos by elegant sceptics and with fluent enthusiasm by boisterous best-sellers. It will not be retold here. The grinding power of the plain words of the Gospel story is like the power of mill-stones; and those who can read them simply enough will feel as if rocks had been rolled upon them. Criticism is only words about words; and what use are words about such words as these? What is the use of word-painting about the dark garden filled suddenly with torchlight and furious faces? 'Are you come out with swords and

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 14; iv. 13.

staves as against a robber? All day I sat in your temple teaching and you took Me not.' Can anything be added to the massive and gathered restraint of that irony; like a great wave lifted to the sky and refusing to fall? 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but for your children.' As the High Priest asked what further need he had of witnesses, we might well ask what further need we have of words. Peter in a panic repudiated Him: 'and immediately the cock crew; and Jesus looked upon Peter, and Peter went out and wept bitterly.' Has anyone any further remarks to offer? Just before the murder He prayed for all the murderous race of men, saying, 'They know not what they do'; is there anything to say to that, except that we know as little what we say? Is there any need to repeat and spin out the story of how the tragedy trailed up the Via Dolorosa and how they threw Him in haphazard with two thieves in one of the ordinary batches of execution: and how in all that horror and howling wilderness of desertion one voice spoke in homage, a startling voice from the very last place where it was looked for, the gibbet of the criminal; and He said to that nameless ruffian, 'This night shalt thou be with Me in Paradise'? Is there anything to put after that but a full-stop?"

Yet there are two things that remain to do. The first is to return to our contemplation of the historic Drama with the two-fold conviction in our minds that every word of Jesus is a "word of the Kingdom"<sup>1</sup> and that of the coming of that Kingdom in power on earth the death of Jesus is the effective cause. The second is to attempt in words, however broken, to give some account of the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 19.

meaning of that great Act of Atonement which was wrought out upon the Cross.

First, then, in the light of after-events, it has become possible to understand how it was that Jesus predicted an imminent coming of the Son of Man and an imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God in power. These predictions are not apocalyptic in the sense of postulating a cataclysmic ending of the present Order. They look forward to a catastrophic change which did actually occur. They refer to the events, Divine yet Human, of the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Pentecostal coming of the Son of Man through the mission of the Spirit.

It is true that there was a day and hour that none knew—neither the angels nor the Son, but the Father only. But there was also a day and hour which would fall within the limits of the actual generation in whose ears the prediction was made. “For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He cometh in His own glory and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God.”<sup>1</sup> There are two comings here, but they are successive catastrophic stages in one divine event. The final coming of the Son of Man in glory marks the establishment of the Divine-Human Kingdom above Time for ever. Similarly, the Kingdom of God, which some then alive will see before they die, is itself a coming—in power, though not in glory—of the Son of Man.

It is in this sense that the words with which Jesus sent out the twelve on their first mission are to be understood.

<sup>1</sup> Mark viii. 38 ; ix. 1 ; *see also* Matt. xvi. 27 f. ; Luke ix. 26 f.



"Ye shall not have completed the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come."<sup>1</sup> Some twenty years later a Christian convert and apostle protested in a letter to a young Church in Asia Minor that he was unknown by face to the Churches of Judea that were "in Christ" before himself.<sup>2</sup> By that date the original apostles had long "completed the cities of Israel." By that date also the Son of Man had long been come.

There is a proximate coming of the kingdom "in power," and a final coming of the Son of Man "in power and great glory." But the first coming (of the kingdom) is itself a coming of the Son of Man, and the final coming (of the Son of Man) is itself the final catastrophic inauguration of the destined heavenly order.

This distinction within the unity of the "apocalyptic utterances" of Jesus has, in our own day, seldom been discerned. With the apocalyptic strain inherent in the Gospel and in all Christianity worthy of the name I hope to deal at another time. At the moment, what I am concerned to advertise is this. The actions and the significance of Jesus are not to be estimated simply in the light of the titles current in His day. Those titles on His lips pointed beyond themselves. He fulfilled the Scriptures—but in His own way. It is impossible for the titles of Jesus to be understood unless such titles are considered on each several occasion in the context both of the particular incident or utterance and of the Gospel as a whole.

It is dismally uninspired criticism to define a title in advance and to insist that it shall have precisely the same meaning wherever it appears in the Gospel record. Even

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 23.      <sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 22; *see also* 1 Thess. ii. 14.



to ask in what sense Jesus used the title "Son of Man" is to invite a wrong answer. For that title was used by Jesus in more senses than one. Surely, when the uniqueness and the greatness of that Person are remembered, as also the fluid condition of Jewish expectations at that time, this is precisely what an intelligent student would anticipate. And when Jesus is considered as the founder of a supreme religion it is well, even for those who do not themselves subscribe to the Christian faith, to recollect that for all who do so Jesus must be both of immediate and of final importance. How then could He, "being a Man,"<sup>1</sup> assert His claim to be of final importance for the world without claiming, in so many words, to be personally God? Yet it is precisely this explicit claim to equality with God which the Synoptic Gospels refuse to ascribe to the Jesus of their record.

The conviction gains upon one that the way of Jesus had been prepared beforehand. Not only was there already present to the hearts and minds of pious Israel the dim majestic hope of the Messiah, the anointed of the Lord. Not only was there foreshadowed in the Book of Daniel a kingdom of the saints of the Most High, obscurely yet suggestively embodied in the figure of one both human and divine, "like unto a son of man," yet "coming with the clouds of heaven," and "brought near to the Ancient of Days," one who was to receive a world-wide "kingdom" and a "dominion that should never pass away."<sup>2</sup> Not only so. In that strange Book of Enoch there had appeared on the scene of Jewish imagination a figure in the full sense "apocalyptic." The vision there depicted is a vision of heaven itself, and beside the Ancient of Days

<sup>1</sup> John x. 33.

<sup>2</sup> Dan. vii. 13-27.

appears "the Son of Man, who hath righteousness, with whom dwelleth righteousness, and who reveals all the treasures of that which is hidden."<sup>1</sup> And this Son of Man differs from the figure in Daniel especially in this, that instead of receiving a kingdom from God after God Himself has first vindicated His saints by judgment on their foes, this Son of Man sits in person "upon the throne of his glory, and the sum of judgment was committed unto Him."<sup>2</sup>

Now it may be that Jesus Himself did not use the title "Son of Man" in this extreme apocalyptic sense. It may be that He, whose delight was with the sons of men, He who took His stand upon His manhood, and who quoted constantly and normally from the recognised Scriptures of the Jewish Church, He, above all, whose life and teaching centred entirely on the Kingdom of God, confined His "apocalyptic" use of the title "Son of Man" to the sense which that title bore in the Book of Daniel, where the thought of the Kingdom is dominant. None the less it remains true that Jesus was the master and not the servant of the prophecies, which, in ways undreamt of, He fulfilled, and that He certainly, in word and deed, claimed to exercise the functions of God Himself, not only in redemption, but in judgment. It was therefore inevitable—and, as I should argue, not a thing to be deplored as a mistake, but something which is itself part of the divinely ordered *preparatio evangelica*—that when Jesus had been visibly exalted in His manhood to the heavenly sphere, evangelists should believe that He who claimed and exercised functions of divine judgment and who undoubtedly spoke of Himself normally as Son

<sup>1</sup> Similitudes of Enoch, xlvi. 3.

of Man, deliberately employed that title—when speaking of His cosmic significance—with a reference to the Son of Man portrayed in the Secrets of Enoch. He may well have done so. He certainly acted as one who could have done so. But the question is intricate and I do not wish to close it.

What I here contend for is that a distinction must be made, and firmly made, between those phrases which speak of the Son of Man, or of the Kingdom, in the language of Daniel, as coming “with power” or “with the clouds,” and those which speak of the Son of Man, or of the Kingdom, as coming “with glory” or “with the holy angels.”

Once this is done, the perplexing problem of “apocalyptic” is at least on the verge of a solution which fits the written evidence, and the facts of Christian life, satisfying both the mind and heart, and—what is more to the present purpose—it becomes evident not only that Jesus, as we have seen already, proposed to Himself—at least from the beginning of His public ministry—the dreadful goal of Death; not only that He regarded that death as instrumental to a purpose; and not only that He was fully conscious of what that purpose was, but also that He publicly proclaimed the approaching achievement, through that Act of Death, of a definite and intelligible end.

It is now possible to consider the cardinal utterance of Jesus in this connection. He died as Messiah, King of Israel. “Art Thou the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?” demanded the High Priest. “And Jesus said, I am.” With those words He signed His death warrant. In the same breath He declared what the outcome of His death would be. “And ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at

the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”<sup>1</sup> These words are those of St. Mark’s narrative. St. Matthew repeats them, but emphasises the *immediate* character of the event predicted. “From *now* ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”<sup>2</sup> St. Luke’s version also emphasises the immediacy of the event. “From *henceforth* shall the Son of Man be seated at the right hand of the power of God.”<sup>3</sup>

The reference to the prophecy of Daniel is beyond all question. “Behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came unto the ancient of days, and they brought him near unto him. And there was given him dominion and honour \* and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him : his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”<sup>4</sup> Thus Jesus in these words proclaimed, and was understood to be proclaiming, that He was on the point of exaltation, and that, coincident with that exaltation to a position of divine power, would be the erection of His Kingdom visibly upon earth, a Kingdom that should have no end.

That prediction was unmistakably fulfilled in both its parts. Not only was the Son of Man exalted, but His Kingdom was established upon earth in power ; and the Kingdom cannot be separated from the Son of Man whose Kingdom it is. When, therefore, we go on to ask in what

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 61 f.    <sup>2</sup> Matt. xxvi. 63 f.    <sup>3</sup> Luke xxii. 67-69.

<sup>4</sup> Dan. vii. 13 f.

\* So the Septuagint, which in this passage has “honour” (τιμή) not “glory” (δόξα).

sense the prediction was fulfilled, that members of the Jewish Sanhedrin should see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven, there is little doubt as to the answer.

Only seven weeks after these words were spoken, in that very city where the Speaker had been crucified, His seemingly shattered cause revived in power, the once timorous disciples proclaimed the Resurrection of the Crucified, and three thousand members were added to the Christian Church.<sup>1</sup> Surely the most hardened members of the Sanhedrin must have been strangely stirred by this incalculable outburst of the delusion which, with a dreadful literalness, they had nailed to the counter fifty days before. Surely those with any capacity for faith must have seen in this incredible revival of a ruined cause a true fulfilment of that calm Prisoner's prediction. The Kingdom of God was on that day visibly manifested before their eyes, and manifested with a power that it had not possessed before. It is not a matter for surprise that Gamaliel himself could advise the Sanhedrin to "refrain from these men and to leave them alone . . . lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God."<sup>2</sup> Nor is it astonishing that "a great company of the priests believed."<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless the Kingdom, though manifested in power, was not a phenomenon overpowering and beyond challenge. It was manifest, but never obvious. It made, as always, an appeal to faith. So Jesus had Himself foreseen and foretold. The Son of Man had come indeed in power. Yet the question still remained to answer: "When the Son of Man cometh will He find faith on the earth?"<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Acts vi. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Acts v. 38 f.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xviii. 7 f.

There was always the possibility, and in some cases even the likelihood, that He would not. The parable of Dives and Lazarus had already envisaged that probability. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded even though one rise from the dead."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. 31.



*"Thou wrongest our philosophy, O sir,  
In stooping to enquire of such an one,  
As if his answer could impose at all!  
He writeth, doth he? well, he may write.*

*For (as I gathered from a lecturer)  
Their doctrines could be held by no sane man."*

BROWNING, *Cleon*  
(slightly adapted).

## PART THREE

### THE UNIQUE DOGMA

#### CHAPTER VIII

##### THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

✓ It is frequently forgotten that the Gospels presuppose the Resurrection of Jesus and presuppose it fundamentally. These little books were written with no other object than to provide those who already lived by faith in Jesus as the Conqueror of death with some account of His life and teaching while on earth. To forget this fact is to incapacitate oneself entirely for any delicate appreciation of the historical fidelity of the evangelists. It involves missing the somewhat astonishing feat which has been achieved. For these three authors have contrived to write of One whom they utterly believed to have actually risen in His body from the grave, without even *referring* to that unparalleled Resurrection until their narrative has run nearly half its course. And even then there are only some half-dozen short passages in the pre-Crucifixion records of each Gospel which refer to the gigantic event to which the whole volume is yet in each case consciously leading up. This simple fact is, in itself, a striking witness to the self-restraint and the historical sobriety of the writers.

The Gospels themselves, indeed, furnish the supremely cogent evidence for the fact of the Resurrection only when taken in combination with the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostolic letters, and the history of the Church. In the

long run the chief evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the fact of the Christian Church. Supposing that all the Gospels had broken off, as St. Mark breaks off, at the point where the women discovered the empty tomb; suppose also that St. Paul's record of the Resurrection appearances, of which he had received an account from eye-witnesses, had never been written; and that the opening verses of the Acts of the Apostles had been lost, we should then have no account of the manner of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, were that so, we should be driven, in the interests of historical understanding, to postulate some overwhelming event to account for the difference between the followers of Jesus who fled in terror and despair on Good Friday and those same followers who, some six weeks later, astonished the Jewish authorities by their boldness—a boldness, be it remembered, which was no flash in the pan, but which endured through the whole life of the first witnesses, persisted through the centuries of persecution, irradiated the lives of Christians in the period which followed the conversion of Constantine, and still distinguishes the true disciples of Christ in the face of the problem and mystery of death, as also in the face of the problem and mystery of life. In any case, historically speaking, there must be some great event adequate to explain the magnitude and the persistence of the change which passed over that little Palestinian community, transfiguring timidity into heroism. The members of that community ascribed their new certainty to a tremendous fact. They ascribed it to the Bodily Resurrection of the Crucified.

Now Christianity—a solid fact of history if ever there was one—demands some explanation adequate to its own

massiveness and extraordinary vigour. No conjectured cause hitherto put forward as a substitute for the Bodily Resurrection of the Crucified comes anywhere near providing a basis in the least adequate to the soaring yet substantial structure which has been built, and is still building, upon the Resurrection Faith. Cut out the Resurrection and you reduce Christianity to a monstrosity and an enigma.

Of course, in the case of those people who approach the Christian faith from the outside and are frequently impatient of any explanation of a miraculous character, it would obviously be unfair to expect an immediate surrender to any such argument as that which has just been adumbrated. But those who have read with any sympathy at all the foregoing chapters of the present book may perhaps be expected, in fairness, to recognise that the Bodily Resurrection of the Crucified, if it took place, would correspond signally with the Gospel Picture and the Gospel Drama as a whole. The Gospels, considered merely as a lifeless and musty *corpus* of ancient writings, from which the genius of criticism is to evoke, if it may be, some simulacrum of historical reality, will doubtless be found to contain a number of tangled details and worrying microscopic inconsistencies. So would any historical documents handled in such a spirit. But this is not the spirit in which great history is written, nor the spirit in which the true historian approaches any documents whatever.

I propose, then, that we should approach the Gospel narratives in respect of the alleged resurrection of Jesus Christ in the clear light of the undoubted fact that the evangelists, whether mistakenly or not, did actually believe

intensely that this Jesus had risen in His body from the sepulchre in which He had been entombed for something less than forty hours. They believed that He actually quitted the sepulchre on the third day. It is not true that the appalling disaster of Good Friday induced in the reflective minds of the disciples the conclusion that so terrible an end to so masterly a life must be somehow false to the ultimate facts. It is not true, nor—unless human nature then was strikingly different from human nature now—is it in the least likely. Still less is it possible that they should *all* have arrived in their inner consciousness at this strange yet inexpugnable conviction; and if, *per impossibile*, all this had happened, it is something less than likely that they should have consented to date this mental conviction, date it very early, transform it into an objective and manifested fact, and go out into the world with the news that this Jesus who had been slain rose from the grave “on the third day.”

The Bodily Resurrection of the Crucified upon the third day is the fact to which the apostles were specially commissioned to bear witness, so that when through the defection of Judas it became necessary to appoint another member of the apostolic band the choice of his successor was limited to those who—in the words of St. Peter—had “compared with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that He was taken up from us.”<sup>1</sup> The Resurrection of Jesus, alike in the Gospels and in the Creeds, is dated: “On the third day He rose again.” This point in itself is no mean evidence that the Resurrection was an actual and manifest factual reality. It is not usual

<sup>1</sup> Acts i. 21 f.

for communities to date the convictions of their individual members. If we were to restate the Creeds in a form corresponding with views of the "Resurrection" put forward in not a few modern books, the clause in question would run that "on the third day Peter, and perhaps one or two other disciples of the Master, arrived at the conviction that he was still alive in the spiritual sphere."

A little reflection will soon discover on which side the fantasy lies here. And, when we remember the results which flowed directly from the Resurrection, there will remain little doubt that something wonderful did actually occur. The Gospels do something to fill in the picture. Indeed they do a great deal. Their stories are circumstantial, unanimous in their witness to the central fact, and discrepant in certain details, thus making it clear that we have to do with independent traditions of one common event and not with a story concocted beforehand or with any allegorical description of a "spiritual," *i.e.* (in the thin, over-refined sense unhappily put upon that word in so much modern thought) a non-bodily, occurrence.

Something overwhelming, something astonishing, something unique, actually occurred on the third day. From that moment the community of Jesus, by a manifest and glorious act of God, was carried across from the darkness of despair into the light of a substantial and enduring hope. Is it any wonder that "the third day" was regarded as the decisive moment which marked the transition of the Kingdom of God into the heavenly sphere? Is it any wonder that from that moment up to the present moment "the first day of the week"<sup>1</sup> has been the sacred day of

<sup>1</sup> Mark xvi. 2; Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor. xvi. 2.



the Christian Church and has finally dislodged the Jewish Sabbath from its unique position ?

Now what needs to be borne in mind is the manifest fact that the immediate and sustained pre-eminence of "the third day" or "the first day of the week" in Christian thought and devotion was determined by the belief that on that particular day there actually occurred a glorious and unanticipated event. Henceforward that particular day and that particular event were indissolubly connected together in Christian thought and Christian worship.

Nevertheless the Gospel records make it certain that, previous to the event, there was no expectation in the disciples' minds that anything whatever would occur upon "the third day." It is not credible that, if grounds for such an expectation already existed, the disciples would have refused at least to wait until the third day was over before resigning themselves finally to despair. It is not credible that, if grounds for such an expectation already existed, the message of the women about the empty tomb and about the angelic proclamation would have appeared to the apostles themselves as "idle tales."<sup>1</sup>

While, then, it is certain that the Lord did predict His resurrection on more than one occasion before His passion, it seems equally certain that that prediction was made in enigmatic terms and contained no precise reference either to the manner or to the time of the event. The explicit reference to the third day, which occurs in all the predictions in the Gospels where the Passion and Resurrection are foretold *together*, is due to "the third day" having been read back into those predictions in the light

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 11.

of the event which, on the third day, did actually occur. The Lord foretold His rejection, His crucifixion, and His resurrection ; but it is improbable that He foretold that His murderers would spit upon Him.<sup>1</sup> In this case, as in the case of the " third day " itself, a happening which did in fact occur was read back into the original predictions of His passion.

All this is perfectly natural, and indeed practically inevitable. But the supposition does not depend simply upon the fact that the disciples themselves manifestly had no premonition that the third day was fateful. It is indicated in the Gospels themselves that the Lord's prediction of His resurrection was less explicit and precise than it was supposed to have been after the event.

Thus in St. Mark's Gospel the Confession of St. Peter leads up to the Lord's first prediction of this kind. His words are thus recorded : " And He began to teach them openly that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed, and on the third day rise again." <sup>2</sup> Here we have the explicit prediction that after His death Jesus would, on the third day, rise again. Nevertheless the account of the Transfiguration, which immediately follows, shows plainly that the prediction of the Resurrection was not so precise as here appears. " And as they were coming down from the mountain He charged them to tell no man what they had seen, save when the Son of Man should be risen from the dead, and they kept the saying, *questioning among themselves what the rising again should mean.*" <sup>3</sup> Does it not look as though this was the first intimation of the Resurrection which came home at all to their understanding—an intimation, be it noted,

<sup>1</sup> Mark x. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Mark viii. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Mark ix. 9 f.

which conveys no precise information as to the time or manner of the event, an intimation, moreover, which made some slight impression on their minds only because the Transfiguration itself had to some extent prepared them to accept it? It seems probable, then, that the first prediction, given at Cæsarea Philippi, when the Passion and the Resurrection were foretold together, impressed the disciples merely as a prediction of the Passion. The final words, "and shall rise again," were robbed of all effective meaning by the dreadful prophecy of the approaching disaster. Hence Peter's remonstrance: "This be far from thee!"<sup>1</sup> where no reference is made to any Resurrection hope.

The case seems similar in respect of the second prediction, recorded in the next chapter of St. Mark. "For He taught His disciples, and said unto them, The Son of Man is delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him: and when He is killed, after three days He shall rise again. *But they understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask Him.*"<sup>2</sup> Here again we have a genuine prediction by Jesus of His resurrection. None the less, here too the note of time, the "after three days" has almost certainly been read back into what was actually a prediction, in general terms, of His resurrection. What the disciples failed to understand was what was meant by the rising again.

It is to be remembered that the Jews in general, under the guidance of the Pharisees, entertained a vivid though not precise expectation of an ultimate general resurrection of God's people. What made the prediction of Jesus enigmatic for His followers was that in this case the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xvi. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ix. 31 f.

resurrection was *individualised*. We have a parallel in the account given in the Fourth Gospel of the dialogue between Jesus and Martha, where precisely the same antithesis is in question. "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection." <sup>1</sup>

There is also in St. Mark's Gospel a second forecast of the Resurrection, apart from any detailed forecast of the Passion, a forecast which—as in the case of the words spoken on the descent from the mountain of Transfiguration—is not so much a direct prediction as a phrase which presupposes a time when the Resurrection will already have taken place. After the Last Supper, the Lord and His apostles had quitted the upper room and gone to the Mount of Olives. "And Jesus said unto them, All ye shall be offended: for it is written I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad. Howbeit, after I am raised up I will go before you into Galilee." <sup>2</sup> Here again there is no precise note of time such as that contained in the mention of the third day.

It seems, then, not unlikely that the Lord in His predictions of His approaching resurrection made no explicit and precise reference to the time of that event. No explicit and precise reference! For when the expression about "the third day" was inserted in the light of after events into the evangelical records of the Lord's predictions, the writers had a genuine basis, in other words of Jesus, for their attribution to Him of such a precise reference to the time of the Resurrection. There is an enigmatic saying of Jesus, recorded in different

<sup>1</sup> John xi. 23-25.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiv. 27 f.

contexts alike in St. Mark's Gospel and in the Fourth Gospel, which contained a suggestion of some signal act of power to be wrought by Himself "in three days." The saying made a great impression upon His enemies and was used as a taunt against Jesus as He hung upon the Cross.

The testimony of the witnesses against the Prisoner as He stood before the High Priest and the Sanhedrin was that they had heard Him say, "I will destroy this sanctuary that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands."<sup>1</sup> Such is the record of St. Mark's Gospel, and the evangelist adds that the bystanders at Calvary "railed upon Him," shaking their heads and saying, "Ah, thou that destroyest the sanctuary and buildest it in three days, save thyself."<sup>2</sup> In this Gospel the saying is left in its original enigmatic nature. St. John records it in another context and adds an explanation.

The Johannine saying occurs in connection with the cleansing of the Temple by Jesus when He drove out the sheep and oxen from the Temple courts and expelled the money-changers. The Jews demanded some sign as evidence of His authority for acting in this way. "Jesus answered, Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this sanctuary in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?"<sup>3</sup> Then follows the evangelist's explanation of these enigmatic words of Jesus. "He spake of the sanctuary of His body. When, therefore, He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He spake this."

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xv. 29.

<sup>3</sup> John ii. 19-22.



For many people these words have remained as enigmatic as when they were first uttered. The Church of the Risen Lord indeed, as appears in St. Paul's letters and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as well as in the Christian Eucharist, understood their meaning aright from the beginning. The ancient sacrifices had yielded to the true Sacrifice of Christ, once offered, and in the Eucharist that Sacrifice was perpetually presented before God and shared by Christ's faithful people. None the less, the meaning of these strange words was revealed only by the Resurrection and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and, when first uttered, they were, as St. John points out, unintelligible to friends and enemies alike. This word of Jesus could not possibly have aroused any expectation of the resurrection on the third day. At the same time, when the event had on that day occurred, the saying would at once appear as a prediction of it.

All this is an illustration of the fact, already noted, that the Gospels record in the main one great work of preparation for something yet to come. In the light, indeed, of the Resurrection and of Pentecost, what had been obscure became clear. None the less, the language of Jesus was, at the time, necessarily enigmatic when He spoke of that unanticipated future.

Nor is it even necessary to hold that the Lord Himself expected to rise from the dead precisely upon the Sunday morning. He is concerned with the fact of His resurrection, and with its imminence, but not with the exact moment of its occurrence. It seems likely that the three days of which He spoke were not in His mind three definite periods of twenty-four hours, but rather three indefinite and extended "moments,"—the "day" of His



public ministry, the "day" of His death and burial, and the "day" of His resurrection. Such a method of speaking is in conformity with His normal practice. We have a clear instance of this indefinite use of the word "day" in His reply to the Pharisees who urged Him to flee from the wrath of Herod. "Go and tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils and work cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I am perfected."<sup>1</sup> It is clear that this does not mean that only three days of life remained to Him. These "days" represent indefinite periods of time.

It may now be easier to understand the apparently perplexing fact that the apostles themselves not only had no expectation that the Sunday after Good Friday was to be uniquely eventful, but that they had no firm or vivid expectation of the individual resurrection of their Lord at all. Like so many people to-day, they, too, in the period before the Exaltation of Jesus, were inclined to interpret His words narrowly rather than generously. If it came to choosing, it was more likely that He meant less rather than that He meant more than He said. Like Martha in the case of her brother Lazarus, the apostles in the case of their Master believed, no doubt, that He would rise again, but by that resurrection they understood merely that He would share in the general resurrection at the Last Day. That was not an unreal hope in itself, but it was a distant hope, and one that was almost inevitably ousted by the urgent and bitter bereavement of the vivid and gloomy present experience of the dreadful Friday.

Perhaps it will be felt that, in considering at some length the question of the predictions of His resurrection made by

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 32 f.

Jesus before His death, I have been exaggerating the importance of a point which is, after all, of no great significance. Yet what is here at stake is the legitimate and necessary exercise of the imagination upon the facts of history, without which history itself will cease to deserve the name. I am not asking you to accept an individual interpretation of documents. I am asking you to consider the documents for yourself, "to search the Scriptures whether these things are so."<sup>1</sup> And if you will do this, I believe that you may very well see in a new light the story of the Resurrection, and seize, perhaps for the first time, the spontaneous and self-authenticating character of the Gospel records, with the result that you will yourself actually live through the tremendous experience of that little band of men and women upon the first Easter Day.

If this attempt is sincerely made, it will not really be possible to miss the fact that the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave was not the spontaneous creation of human faith. So many modern *Lives of Jesus* conclude with a chapter, generally entitled "What happened afterwards," whose moral is that nothing happened at all, except an inexplicable access of faith in Jesus as being actually living. Jesus, that is to say, did not rise from the grave, but His disciples, by their clear-eyed faith and superb generosity of confidence in Him, pierced through the dense overwhelming cloud of the stark proximate reality of Calvary to the clear heaven of the ultimate reality of His continued spiritual existence in the other world. Thus the power of God, and the personal primacy of Jesus in the creation of a new humanity,

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 11.

are denied in favour of a creative act of human faith, which plucked out of the most real and black of tragedies an inspiring and unquenchable confidence of triumph and assurance.

This thin and unconvincing theory cuts right across the glowing records of the Gospel, and contradicts the facts of human experience and human life as we know it. Seriously held, it takes the whole pith out of Christianity, reducing the Divine Redemption, which is our hope and our incentive, to the dimensions of a human dream. So is there substituted for the Gospel preached by the apostles and believed on in the world, another gospel, which is not another, but a feeble and nerveless substitute.

I repeat, then, that the evidence of the Gospels and of the Church, and of Christian heroism and Christian life throughout the ages until now, is that the Resurrection of Jesus was a glorious and manifested act of God. The appearances of the Risen Lord were real appearances of a real Person who had risen in a real body from the grave. These appearances were unexpected in themselves ; and the manner of them, as we shall see, was different from anything that could have been anticipated even were any such anticipations formed. In a word, there is no shred of evidence, and no shred of likelihood, that the "appearances" of Jesus after His death and burial were the creation of the daring faith of men.

Nevertheless, it was only to believers, only to those who were already members by faith of the Divine Kingdom which Jesus had come to establish upon earth, that the Risen Lord appeared. Why is this ? Because the Resurrection of Jesus is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He who rose from the grave, to die no more, was the Divine

Son Himself, and only those who had learnt already to put their trust in Him could read aright the meaning of the Resurrection. The world outside has always supposed with Festus, the Roman Governor before whom St. Paul appeared as a prisoner, that the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection amounts to no more than that there is "one Jesus, who was dead, and whom Paul and his fellow-Christians affirm to be alive."<sup>1</sup>

This is not the place in which to treat of the doctrine of the Resurrection. What I wish to point out here is that the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection are something more and something other than accounts of the happy restoration to His friends of One whom they had mourned as dead. In a word, the Risen Lord of the Gospel record is not only alive, but transfigured and empowered. The fact that He is so depicted is another signal witness to the authentic character of our accounts. Let us examine this point briefly.

A cursory reading of the narratives of the first Easter morning is enough to make very clear indeed that there was something more and other in the hearts of the disciples than the natural joy which they could not but feel at the return of the Master whom they loved. St. Mark's account breaks off suddenly at the point where the women leave the empty tomb after receiving the angelic announcement of their Lord's resurrection. They have not seen the Risen Lord Himself; they have only found the sepulchre unsealed and empty. Yet it is not as we might have expected it to be with them. It is not joyful anticipation that is uppermost in their minds. Even as the words of the angelic message are yet sounding in their

<sup>1</sup> Acts xxv. 19.

ears they are struck with something very much like panic. "They went out," says St. Mark, "and fled from the sepulchre ; for they trembled and were amazed ; neither said they anything to any man, for they were afraid." <sup>1</sup> With these words the original Marcan manuscript breaks off—in the middle of a sentence.

Yet already this fragmentary account is eloquent of genuine history. It is not so that men invent, however spontaneous and unpremeditated their invention. Moreover, this same note of awe runs through all the Resurrection narratives. There manifestly appears between the Risen Jesus and His followers a certain distance that was not so marked before He suffered ; although, indeed, as we have seen, it had never been entirely absent. As it is, the Risen Christ appears as One who has been in some way altered. Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus,<sup>2</sup> Mary Magdalene in the garden,<sup>3</sup> do not recognise Him at first. Once, in the moment of recognition, He vanishes out of sight.<sup>4</sup> He bids the Magdalene, as we shall see, cease holding His feet. And on one occasion when He appeared to the Eleven they were at first terrified and affrighted, supposing that they beheld a spirit.<sup>5</sup>

It is this distance between the Risen Jesus and His most intimate followers which seems to me to be precisely the kind of thing which would never have been imagined, and which would have been absent in the case of a mere vision of the Master. It is perhaps worth while to call attention in this connection to the experience also of St. Paul. In the Acts of the Apostles we have two

<sup>1</sup> Mark xvi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 15 f.

<sup>3</sup> John xx. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Luke xxiv. 30 f.

<sup>5</sup> Luke xxiv. 36 f.

accounts of a vision of Jesus granted to the apostle. On the first occasion it is said that the Lord spoke to him in a vision at Corinth, bidding him to remain in the city and continue his work.<sup>1</sup> The second occasion was during his imprisonment at Jerusalem. "And the night following the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer: for as thou hast testified concerning Me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."<sup>2</sup> Both these visions are recorded in a calm and practical, almost matter-of-fact way. But in the case of the appearance on the Damascus road—always sharply distinguished by St. Paul from all mere visions of the Lord, and regarded by him as being on precisely the same footing as the appearances to the original apostles—the presentation is different. The Lord appears in glory, Saul does not know who it is, and when Jesus reveals His identity we are told that he, "*trembling and astonished*, said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"<sup>3</sup> The features are the same as those which distinguish the other Resurrection appearances. Jesus is not only alive, but glorified; until He makes Himself known He is unrecognised; and the result is that the recipient of the revelation trembles and is astonished.

Both in this case and in the cases recorded in the Gospels it is true that between the Risen Lord and those to whom He manifests Himself there is a certain distance. The mystery which had clung about Him while He went in and out amongst men in the days of His earthly life has become more evident and impressive. And it will be our loss if we allow this element of awe and strangeness

<sup>1</sup> Acts xviii. 9 f.    <sup>2</sup> Acts xxiii. 11 f.    <sup>3</sup> Acts ix. 3-6 (A.V. reading).



to be overlooked. For it is precisely against this background of mystery and something very much like religious terror that the vivid fact stands out that the Risen Jesus is the same Jesus, He who was born at Bethlehem, who walked the roads of Palestine, and who died upon the Cross. Indeed, it is precisely the fact that He is different which makes it urgently necessary that He should convince them beyond all possibility of doubt that He is yet the same. Just because He is different it is necessary that He should show them His hands and His feet, that He should bid them handle Him and see, and that He should take food and eat before them.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, there remains within this identity a difference, and the difference is as important as the identity. For it cannot be too emphatically said that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, whether in history or in religious experience, appears, and has always appeared, as manifestly more and other than the resuscitation of One who had been dead. I do not wish to labour the point, for if it requires labouring at all it can only be that the whole effort of the evangelists has failed of its effect. This much, however, may be added. If you insist on isolating the Resurrection stories from their setting, if you view them entirely apart from the Gospel Picture and the Gospel Drama as a whole, as well as from the continuous and vigorous life of the Christian Church from that day to this, you are doing your best to reduce them to lifeless records of a portent which is robbed of almost all significance by being treated in an unnatural way. The stories of the Resurrection are straightforward enough, but they are not *obvious* stories. They carry with

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 39-43.

them no suggestion of being ingenuous fictions, born of a desire to believe that something had taken place which in reality had not taken place at all.

These stories record a happening which must have been inconceivable until after the event itself. None the less, once that event has occurred it is recognisably consonant with the Gospel Drama as a whole, and shares the enthralling and self-evidencing uniqueness alike of the Gospel Portrait and the Christian Faith. The Gospel, the Faith, and the Resurrection cohere together. For manifestly these simply told, circumstantial narratives represent the resurrection of Jesus as much more than an escape from death. It appears as a resurrection in power—not merely an escape from death, but a final triumph over it ; not simply a return to life, but an advance on to another plane of being ; not just a revival, but a transformation. And the blossom of the Resurrection, once it has bloomed before our eyes, is seen to be the congruous product of the seed-time of the evangelical Life. For the Resurrection presents itself as a new beginning, as the final defeat of death, as the sure pledge of immortality—the foundation of a Kingdom that shall know no end. And it springs right out of the old order. It is One who is Man who is now as Man immortal, beyond the touch of death for ever. It is a climax ; not, as modern writers are prone to represent it, an anti-climax.

All this is manifest enough in the pages of the Gospels. If they fail to make any appeal it will be of small avail to add comments or arguments. If men hear not the Gospels and the Epistles, neither will they be persuaded even though One should rise from the dead in similar circumstances to-day.

Nevertheless, so many people approach the Gospels as though they, and not the Church of Christ, were originally the prime factor in the conversion of men, that it does seem worth while to point out that the fragmentary records of the Resurrection, which those Gospels contain, are, on the whole, mutually consistent, to a degree which is as great as we have any reason to expect, on the assumption that this unanticipated, unique, and gigantic event did actually occur. But this self-consistency is fundamental, not superficial. It requires sympathetic study to be appreciated at its true value. I should like to illustrate the point by following a method which has been found fruitful in our study already. I propose, that is, to approach the Resurrection narratives of the four Gospels with a definite question in mind. *To whom did the Risen Jesus first appear?* The interesting point is that if we examine the evidence of the four Gospels, there is really no doubt that the records point us to one answer and one only, *in spite of the fact that the answer of no one Gospel agrees with the answer of another.* It is this kind of fact that I had in mind when I spoke of a fundamental as opposed to a superficial agreement.

To whom, then, did the Risen Jesus first appear? To this question, as we have seen, the original St. Mark returns no answer at all, since the Marcan account of the Resurrection breaks off before any appearances of the risen Jesus have been recorded.

St. Matthew's Gospel replies that the Lord first appeared to "the women," that is, to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, as they ran with fear and great joy to give His disciples word about the empty tomb and the

angelic message. "And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him."<sup>1</sup>

St. Luke, on the other hand, virtually denies, through the mouth of Cleopas, that "the women" saw the Risen Lord on this occasion. For when the two disciples had met the stranger on the road to Emmaus and told him of the events of the Friday, they added these words: "But certain women of our company astonished us, who having been early at the tomb and having found that the body of Jesus was not there, came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive."<sup>2</sup> Clearly, if these women had met Jesus on their way from the tomb, as St. Matthew declares them to have done, their message would have been different from this. St. Luke's answer to our question is that the Risen Jesus appeared first to Peter. For although the appearance to Cleopas is the first appearance to be recorded in the Lucan narrative, that appearance occurred towards evening; but when the two disciples returned immediately to Jerusalem they found the Eleven gathered together and declaring exultantly, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon."<sup>3</sup>

The Fourth Gospel asserts that the first appearance of the Risen Lord was to Mary Magdalene alone.<sup>4</sup>

Now, taken as they stand, these three accounts are completely, or almost completely, divergent. Is it possible to explain the divergences? I think it is.

We have already noticed St. Luke's virtual denial of any appearance of the Risen Jesus to "the women" on

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxviii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiv. 22 f.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xxiv. 33 f.

<sup>4</sup> John xx. 14.

their way back from the empty tomb. It may further be remarked that in the same evangelist's account of the actual visit of the women to the tomb it is clearly suggested that an interval elapsed between their arrival and the appearance of the angelic messengers. "And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass *while they were perplexed thereabout*, all at once two men stood by them in shining raiment."<sup>1</sup> It is also to be noticed that by universal consent of all our evangelical authorities Mary Magdalene was a member of the party of women who visited the sepulchre early on the first day of the week.

Now is it unreasonable to suppose that, alone among the women, Mary Magdalene did not wait any longer, once it had become evident that the body of Jesus was missing, but set off at once for Peter's lodging, leaving the other women still within the sepulchre? This supposition would tally extremely well with the Johannine account, in which Mary on her arrival at Peter's house has no Easter message and no tidings of any angelic appearances, but simply exclaims: "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and *we* know not where they have laid Him,"<sup>2</sup> the plural pronoun making it clear that, although in the Johannine account Mary Magdalene alone is mentioned, she was yet known to have come from the company of others.

If this view commends itself, the Lucan account of the news brought to Jerusalem by "the women" before Cleopas had left the city is correct. They had found an empty tomb and had seen a vision of angels who declared that Jesus was alive; but they had not seen the

<sup>1</sup> Luke xxiv. 3 f.

<sup>2</sup> John xx. 2.



Risen Lord. So far, then, the Lucan and Johannine accounts manifestly cohere.

But what of St. Matthew's statement that as they went to give word to the disciples of the empty tomb and the angelic message, Jesus Himself met them, and that they held Him by the feet and worshipped Him?

At this point it is necessary to exercise one's imagination upon the recorded facts. St. John, it will be remembered, records in detail an appearance of the Risen Lord to Mary Magdalene alone, early on the first Easter Day. May it not very well be that, since it must have become known in Jerusalem, soon after the return of "the women" with their news of the empty tomb and of the angelic message, that Mary Magdalene had seen Jesus Himself; and since it was well known that she had been a member of the original expedition to the sepulchre, is it not, indeed, extremely probable that the story current in Jerusalem on the first Easter Day itself, before nightfall, was to the effect that "the women have seen the Lord"? If this is so, the Matthean discrepancy becomes a not unreasonable discrepancy. The evangelist has extended to *all* the women an experience which in reality was an experience of the Magdalene alone. The error in that case, however, is not the evangelist's in the first instance. It may well go back to the very day of the Resurrection itself.

It seems to me, then, that the somewhat paradoxical expectation with which our inquiry began has been justified, and that the records point to one answer to our question and to one only, despite the fact that no one Gospel agrees on the surface with the answer given in any of the others.



There remain two pieces of corroborative evidence, of which the second is of no little interest. In the first place it is at this point legitimate to appeal to the witness of those verses which were added to complete the Gospel of St. Mark in place of the fragment of the original Gospel which has been lost. The verses are known to have existed in the early years of the second century, and may therefore well be earlier in origin. This early tradition supports the conclusion to which the original Gospels have themselves appeared to point. "Now when He was risen early on the first day of the week He appeared first to Mary Magdalene."<sup>1</sup>

In the second place, it may be remarked that there is an unusually interesting corroboration of our suggested explanation of the Matthean "discrepancy" about the appearance of Jesus to "the women." The suggestion was that the evangelist extended to all the women an experience that befell the Magdalene alone. If that is so, it would follow that his account of the behaviour of the women is actually an account of the Magdalene's behaviour. It would follow in turn that it was the Magdalene who "held Jesus by the feet and worshipped Him."<sup>2</sup> Now, in the Johannine story of the Lord's appearance to the Magdalene, the first words addressed to His devoted follower by Jesus, after greeting her by name, are these: "Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended."<sup>3</sup> It had always struck me as unnatural that the Lord should anticipate an action, and forbid it in advance. If, however, as St. Matthew, on this view, declares, the Magdalene actually held Him by the feet,

<sup>1</sup> Mark xvi. 9.<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxviii. 9.<sup>3</sup> John xx. 16 f.

Jesus did not anticipate an action. The Greek words *μὴ μου ἅπτον* can equally well mean "stop touching me." In this case our suggestion with regard to the Matthean "discrepancy" removes the slight difficulty which to me at any rate had always seemed to be presented by the famous *Noli me tangere* of the Fourth Gospel.

This last point is, of course, incidental and unimportant. It had an interest for me because I noticed it for myself, and because it happened to meet something of which I had always been conscious as a difficulty in the Johannine account. But we must not allow the broad issues to be obscured by details. What our inquiry does make clear is the transparently authentic character of our records. Their very blunders reflect an honest fidelity to the facts as they had been received. These narratives, taken as a whole, are direct, unadorned, and more convincing than an account of an event so unique and marvellous might have reasonably been expected to be. The Christian belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has always from the very beginning rested upon the witness, not of books, but of living men. Yet it is true that, even when the Gospels are treated in isolation from the rest of the New Testament, and from the life of the Church, there appears an inner consistency between the marvellous event so simply narrated and the unique Person so vividly and convincingly portrayed. If Jesus had been an ordinary man the Resurrection would appear as an unintelligible portent. As it is, the Resurrection, so far from obscuring Jesus, illuminates Him. For every account of Jesus which denies His resurrection ends either by mutilating the Gospel Portrait

and reducing Jesus to the position of a great prophet, or by mutilating the Gospel Drama and making of Jesus a heroic failure. On either of these views it is hard to see why He has mattered so much to the world.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE DIVINE ATONEMENT

AT the heart of the Christian Gospel, at the heart of the Christian Creed, at the heart of Christian Worship, and at the heart of Christian Life, stands the Cross of Jesus Christ. It is no play upon words, but a serious assertion, that in Christianity the Cross really is crucial. To miss its meaning is in the end to miss everything.

And yet, from the very beginning up to the present moment, the Cross is the obstacle over which every one trips unless he already to some extent knows Christ. St. Paul observed the fact many centuries ago, but the same fact is equally remarkable to-day. It is, indeed, a fact of general experience.

The Man on the Cross, like the Babe in the Manger, is set for the fall and the rising again of many in the not-yet-Christian Israel. Those who stumble here often have already a hold of a kind on Truth, a little knowledge, ready-made ideas of what should be: they are half-blinded by notions not themselves untrue, mistake the ideal for the real, ideas for facts, and so live at second-hand where the profounder issues of living are concerned. "The Jews demand a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom," but the power and wisdom of God are expressed in terms of *life*. That is why the simple and the wise respond to the appeal of Calvary and find there a meaning which the clever tend to miss.

Augustine of Hippo, truly wise, a rare intelligence, drank deep of the wells pierced by philosophers ; “ but one thing he found not among them—the Word made Flesh.” A simple soul like him who is known to history as Brother Lawrence entered religion because a tree stripped of its leaves in winter stirred him to wonder at the sure procession of the seasons and convinced him of the active providence of God. Both these men—the one wise, the other simple—saw life directly, as a thing of mystery and wonder. To such the Cross appeals because it is congruous with life itself.

None the less, life is pervious to thought, and some account of the meaning of the Cross a Christian should be able to give to himself or to others. Only it is to be remembered that nothing that is supremely worth man’s thought can be thought *out* ; thought *on* it must be, if the self is not to shrivel. The truths of life, however, are not clear, but vivid, and they are “ seen ” with the whole man. The will is stirred and the emotions kindled. The noble legacy of Christian thought is true thought, but it is great thought and not born of the cold reason. Of any one great Christian thinker—St. Paul, St. John, St. Anselm, or St. Bernard—a phrase from George Meredith’s *Ordeal of Richard Feverel* might be used with entire justice. Each one of these wrote, “ His heart in a rapid canter, and his brain bestriding it.”

Not being a great thinker, I must crave your most generous sympathy if I undertake some account of what the doctrine of the Atonement means for the Christian.

In the first place I would say this: The Christian Gospel is primarily good news of a life that men may

share with God through Christ. It is good news of a Kingdom come in power, a Gospel of the Resurrection and the Spirit. Such it has always been.

“Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. Now when they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call to Him. They then that received his word were baptized; and there were added to them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.”<sup>1</sup>

Such is the first recorded preaching of the Gospel, on the very day that the Kingdom of God came with power on earth. Such is the Gospel we proclaim to-day. First, faith in the Risen Christ—then entrance in faith into the Fellowship of His Church. First the Resurrection, then the Breaking of Bread. First the gift of the Spirit, then the learning of the Cross.

We begin the Christian course in the faith that the Son of God has been manifested to destroy the works of the devil, that He has come to bestow life overflowing, and that He is present and active in the Church of His faithful for the overthrowing of every kind of evil, whether within the soul or in the world without. Already in our

<sup>1</sup> Acts ii. 36-42.



Baptism we are sealed as sons of God and members of His Family. In Confirmation we are equipped and empowered for the struggle to which we are summoned. From that moment the Cross of Christ becomes for us the most actual and effectual of facts. We are no longer babes, and the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews become increasingly our own spontaneous utterance. "Wherefore let us leave the word of the A B C of Christ and press on unto full growth, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith towards God."<sup>1</sup> We are committed to the pursuit within the Body of Christ of an incredible perfection, and are smitten with misgivings as the gulf yawns at our very feet—forbidding and unplumbed—the gulf between our misery and the majesty of God.

Already we have faith that in Christ that gulf is somehow bridged, but it remains to cross the bridge. The moment that fact is realised the question surges from heart and mind simultaneously, "How *can* I qualify for the heavenly life?" and "How *can* God forgive?" To both these questions the Cross provides an answer—an answer which is not clear, but vivid.

For we have seen the reality of sin. We *are* sinners. What does that mean? Not that we are past hope. If we were past hope we should have no consciousness of sin. Still, the consciousness of sin and the conquest of sin are two very different things. That victory we have yet to win. Once we realise the odds, we have no stomach for the fight, unless and until we realise that, given perseverance, we have a pledge of victory which can be trusted both with heart and mind.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vi. 1.

Consciousness of sin means the vivid perception that there is something wrong with man. It begins, strangely enough, with the conviction that man is akin to God Himself. Just as a person who could never himself paint may yet appreciate a picture, and is already by that fact shown to be a spirit kindred to the artist, so he who sees the beauty and pathos of life and catches a glimpse, however dim, of some meaning in the world about him appears *ipso facto* as a spirit akin to Him whose Hands have fashioned all that breathing wonder. In the same way, he who desires the good, however feebly ; who has certain "splendid incapacities," knows some deeds he would sooner die than do ; he who, after deliberate wrong-doing, is ashamed, such a being bears witness to himself as one destined for fellowship with the All-Holy God.

But will that destiny ever be fulfilled ? For experience reveals to the man who stands alone that he is inadequate to life and falls below himself. He finds himself despairing of any meaning in the world, his soaring wings are clipped, shades of the prison-house close in upon him, and sorrow, disappointment, vulgar boredom even, embitter youthful confidence. The big world shrinks. Again, his words and thoughts and deeds betray and soil. The evil that he would not that he does and the will to good is weakened.

There is something wrong with man. That is the witness not of theology, but life. Theology endows the brute fact with meaning and kindles hope in the despairing. Man is made in the image of God. He has defaced that Divine likeness, yet it is not yet destroyed. That likeness the Christ came to restore.

History knows only one Figure in whom the Divine likeness is manifestly unimpaired. The wonder is that He is not alien to human hearts. He is incontestably Man. There had always been the problem—how to be demonstrably perfect and demonstrably not a prig. Christ solved the problem—and we despair. Whatever the cause, we simply cannot compete. Yet that Life appeals.

Behold the Man, in whom the Divine image is intact. To Him the visible creation and the normal daily decent life of men were eloquent of God. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts . . . how much more shall your Heavenly Father give? <sup>1</sup> . . . If God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more shall He clothe you? " <sup>2</sup> In Him was found no sin.

Yet He was immensely more and other than an idealist, whether of the placid or the fiery kind. He was no self-contained Teacher, propounding holy maxims from a pinnacle. He did not sweep through the world, His garments delicately drawn aside from polluting contact with "evil" men.<sup>3</sup> He entered wholly into human life. He knew temptation, stark and bitter. He was completely, perfectly, recognisably Man, and as Man He was active for us men. He entered into the bitter consequences of human faithlessness to God.

Conceive, if you can make so difficult an effort of the imagination, a man with an experience unparalleled indeed in human history, and yet a man, no more, no less. Imagine, say, yourself—but yourself with a will unweakened and a soul unstained, with your confidence in

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xi. 13.

life high and unsapped. Reject all thought of God. Rule out the Christ. What would you make of death and what of evil? Could you play your full part in the human drama, throw yourself into the life of men, and keep your will unperturbed, and your hope undimmed, while retaining at the same time the human touch? The odds are very heavy. Just in proportion as you are sensitive and responsive to high aims and splendid deeds and fine emotions those others will tempt you to disgust. Could you really, do you think, contrive to bate no jot of heart or hope, to fly your flag mast-high, and all the time to keep those others in your heart and—what is more—in your company? Again, just in proportion as life is full of colour and stir and promise any clear view of death's certainty stays the current of the blood. Could you draw out of your own resources the power to face that blank disaster with the sure confidence that all is well? Even in the case of a man whose personal integrity was absolute this double task would surely be beyond his power. Unaided, he would be defeated. Man is not sufficient for these things. Not even a man of absolute integrity. And which of us is anything like whole?

Death gives the lie to life. Sin denies all *reasonable* hope of holiness. The facts are dead against God. What wonder, then, if religion is supposed to be played out in an age which reduces even Christianity to concepts and ideals?

But this "Christianity" of concepts and ideals—considered, I mean, as adequate or primary—this "Christianity" with its Jesus "bursting into the world with a new idea of God," is bastard Christianity. The genuine

article has for ever at its *heart* not an ideal, but a naked fact, a naked man upon a solidly real Cross.

Yet what hope is there in a solidly real Cross? None. Our faith and hope is in the Crucified. That unique yet most substantial Person conquered the scheme of things. He—the most alive Figure in history—bowed Himself to death, and by that stooping rose to live for ever. He—the Sinless—exposed deliberately that great heart of His to the gathered onslaught of human pride and malice. There were sufferings keener far than the cruel shame and torments of the body. They hardly bear thinking of—the grisly horseplay of the soldiers mocking the royal claims of the Condemned, the heartless gaze of curious spectators as “sitting down, they watched Him there,” the diabolical taunting of the Sufferer with the challenge to come down from the Cross. Yet these things do bear thinking of, for they were the occasion of an adorable marvel. Jesus was not embittered.

Sin was conquered. “What on earth do I mean by that?” I mean that the wrath of man turned to the praise of God. I mean that Jesus drained that cup of human malice—awful beyond conceiving to His perfect charity—and kept His faith not only in God but in man. I mean, above all, that there has appeared before the clear eyes of God, as well as before the dulled eyes of men, One truly Human, Bone of our bone, Flesh of our flesh, like us in all things, sin except, and that in Him our Manhood is vindicated as worthy of God, and dear to Him beyond all telling. I mean that Jesus Christ transformed a sinful murder into a Holy Sacrifice, and a Sacrifice that endures for ever.

And yet I cannot possibly mean this unless I mean

much more. If Jesus is a man, and nothing more, the spectacle of Calvary may well wring from me utmost admiration and humble homage ; but it is admiration of the unattainable, and homage to one whose train I may not enter. For if Jesus is a man, and nothing more, there is a gulf between us, which He, for all His gallant love, is powerless to bridge. If Jesus is a man, and nothing more, the Cross increases my damnation, who being, like Him, human, lag so far behind the might be and the should be. If Jesus is human and nothing more, yet freely died for man's salvation, He died in vain.

But then, as we have seen, the Cross has always been a snag in the way of those who refuse to recognise the true Godhead of the Lord, as well as His true Manhood. By that refusal they cut the ground from beneath the feet of the Jesus of History, as well as destroying the Christ of Faith. For they rob His most significant action of all effective meaning and invite us to contemplate in the death upon the Cross a supreme act of self-sacrifice which benefits us only as a great example—and that is no benefit at all. It is not only that we are powerless to follow that supreme example. Its very loftiness appals and paralyses. We have no longer even the heart to make a start.

It is interesting, in a melancholy way, to notice that all those who start with a merely human Jesus, though they approach the spectacle of Calvary with deep respect and words of unbounded admiration, always end by dethroning it from that central position which it holds in the Gospels and in the Church and in Christian experience. We are left with a noble teacher who showed upon the Cross how



seriously He believed in His own precepts. We are left asking, "To what purpose was this waste?"

It is only in the light of the historic Faith that the Jesus of History becomes significant. The great doctrine of the Incarnation—the saving truth of God made Man for our salvation—illuminates the Gospel records and receives illumination from them.

More than this. If He who manifestly conquered sin and death upon the Cross as Man is Himself the Eternal Son of the Eternal God, made Man for us, we have an answer to our questions when, as members of the Christian Church, we find ourselves committed to the pursuit of an incredible perfection and called into present fellowship with the All-Holy. "How *can* I live the heavenly life? How *can* God forgive?" I can approach God with a clear heart because Christ Himself is Man, and brings joy to the heart of God. I can live the heavenly life because He who took our nature shares with faithful believers that Divine yet Human life which has triumphed over death and sin for ever. The sting of death is sin, but if we persevere in the Fellowship of Jesus, in Him we can conquer sin, and lay hold here and now on that Eternal Life which He imparts.

After all, the hope and life which multitudes to-day, as in the past, draw from the Crucified, *is* hope, *is* life, just because they see in Him—as the Church of Christ has ever seen—none other than the Eternal God Himself. The Very God, in the act of stooping to the limitations of humanity, has given for ever a new start to us ordinary men. So is it that the power which carried Him through His perfect Sacrifice (with all the bitterness and agony imported into it by human sin) is

both a power that endures and a power that is communicable to faithful and aspiring souls. Indeed, the power by which Christ Jesus overcame the world is that very power, prompting us to nobler life, of which we, members of His Body, are conscious in ourselves.

On this ground, then, the hope of our humanity is firmly based. Sin can be conquered. But sin can thus be conquered only at the cost of our poor pride. We must be content to receive at the hands of the Crucified that generous life which in his own right man does not possess. We are bought with a price and we can never forget it. And we are well content. For already, and on this very ground, one unique achievement of the Christ begins already to be reproduced in us. There had always been the problem, you remember, how to aim directly at perfection without being a prig, how to keep our standard high, yet without treason to our standard to live in charity with all men. In genuine Christianity that problem is almost automatically solved. The standard and the charity go hand in hand. It is possible for a man to claim to have faith in God, and to esteem himself above his neighbour on that very ground. But the Atonement of Christ manifestly makes atonement not only between God and men, but between man and man. For pride is strangled from the start in him who can sincerely say, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."<sup>1</sup>

Now if all this is so—if the doctrine of a real Atonement made by the Son of God Himself from within the ranks of men, if this doctrine, accepted with the mind and

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

heart at once, does issue—as no other conceivable view of the meaning of the Cross could possibly do—in a life where humility and the most aspiring moral and spiritual ambition go inseparably hand in hand ; if this Faith results in making morality no harsh though high emprise, but a thing of grace and beauty ; if this Truth, firmly held, makes it not only possible but natural to seek righteousness, without any risk of striking for one moment the unlovely gesture of the prig ; if this is so, then have we not here already evidence a thousand-fold more convincing to the human being in his entire make-up than any merely logical argument could be that that doctrine is true and self-attesting ? When we ponder this—the unique and, at the first glance, baffling interpretation which the historic Faith in all times and in all places puts upon the fact of Calvary—when we compare it with any non-orthodox estimate of the same fact, does not the incomparable appeal of this Christian dogma shine out in unique splendour and stir the heart with a trumpet-call whose challenge no loyal soldier in life's battle, once he has heard it, can resist ? That is why all true Christian apologetic is aggressive at its root. “The day has risen now ; it has put out these flares.” “Turn to the Cross, messire,” cried St. Catherine of Siena to a disciple. “There is the light that frees us from darkness—not only the gross external darkness of deadly sin, but the darkness of disordered confusion which overwhelms the soul under colour of humility.”

There are great depths beyond. I entreat you to remember that I cast into these depths a short and timid plummet. Yet something further we must make shift to say. Christian humility is not humiliating, and it is

something intensely more and other than the reasonable recognition of a patent fact. It is not only that in all sobriety and truth, as human beings, we are dependent for every breath we draw upon Another who has created and upholds from moment to moment ourselves and all that is ; it is not only that, as members of Christ's Church, we receive in faith from Christ Himself the life that is life indeed. The God of Nature and the God of Grace is One. As that conviction gains upon the Christian consciousness the life of gratitude and confidence and hope becomes itself transfigured. Gratitude passes into rapture and adoration, confidence and hope into an assurance that maketh not ashamed. Rapture—because God humbles Himself for us. Assurance—because He did not stoop in vain. “In this has the love of God been manifested in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ungodly.”<sup>1</sup> And He died to some effect. For He over Whom Death has no more dominion is alive and active in our midst. He is present and active in that Holy Church which is His Body, that Kingdom already in power established among men, the sphere and channel here on earth of a life Divine yet Human, triumphant over death and evil for ever.

Yes, the Cross is indeed the supreme Revelation of an incredible and moving love. But until we see it by faith as an act of saving power, an act which was intended to achieve, an act which has achieved, a great result, the Divine Love will remain for us an all but empty phrase. It requires humility to become a faithful member of this imperfect, foolish-seeming Church. It does not *look* like the Body of the glorious Christ. Nor did the Body in the

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 9 f. ; Rom. v. 8.

Manger, nor yet the Body on the Cross. Yet the Cross issues directly in the Church. Both can be approached in faith alone.

How Christianity coheres with life ! Those who hesitate are doomed to miss life's meaning. Choose in the end you must. Choose boldly then.

Let us make no mistake about it. Sensibility is good. Thought is noble. Enthusiasm is attractive. But something other than these is wanted. "He who is not with Me is against Me."<sup>1</sup> The progress of the Christian is from faith to faith, and faith means action, decisive and steadfast. It means men's turning from their darkness to His light, from the power of evil unto God, "that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are already sanctified through faith in Christ."<sup>2</sup> Not all have sensibility, not all are capable of sustained thought, not all are endowed with imagination. But all can choose what master they will follow and what way they will pursue through life. So it is a Catholic Church. Only within that Church can the full meaning of Divine Love begin to dawn upon the soul. Faith is the first, though not the last, condition of salvation, and faith means faithfulness. It is no accident that it is the Evangelist of Divine Love, the Beloved Disciple of the Lord, who puts the first emphasis on faith.

"God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever *believeth in Him* should not perish but have eternal life."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xxvi. 18.

<sup>3</sup> John iii. 16.

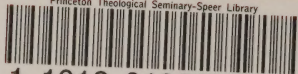








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